

MAJOR OWEN

and other tales



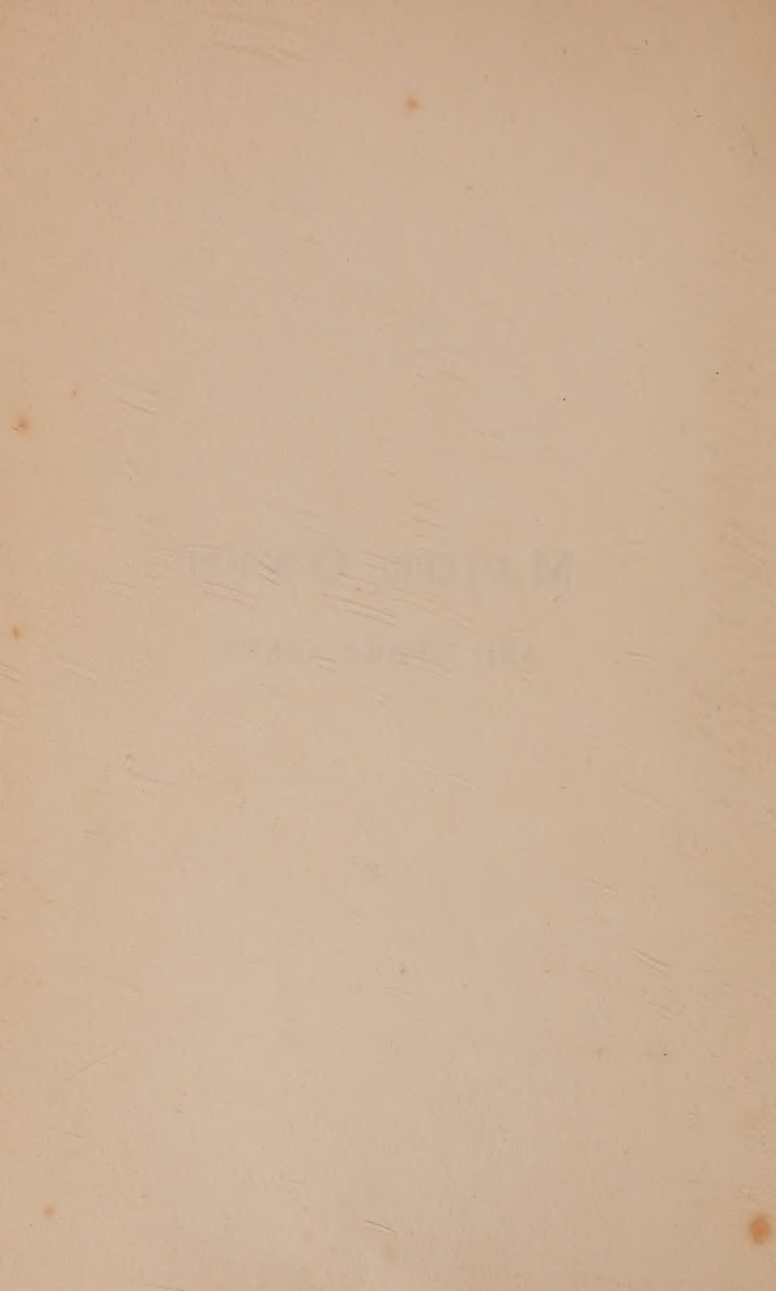
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BY

CHRISTOPHER N. JOHNSTON

K.C., LL.D.

“ ‘ Sir man of lawe,’ quod he, ‘ so have ye blis,
Tel us a tale anon.’ ”

—CHAUCER.

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MAJOR OWEN.

MRS CROWTHER was a goose.

She had come with her husband to visit her uncle, Mr Venables, at his home in Hampshire, but Mr Crowther had been called away to Manchester on business. His wife vowed that she could not sleep alone, at least not in a country-house; it made her so nervous. Accordingly her cousin, good-natured Gerty Venables, was told off to sleep with her and protect her from the dangers, real or imaginary, of the night. The weather was oppressively hot, so was the bed, for Mrs Crowther liked to lie beneath a solid mass of blankets with an eider-down quilt to complete. Gerty could not sleep. She fidgeted and turned restlessly for several hours, afraid even to take a good toss in case she should disturb her cousin, who nestled under the bed-

clothes as though it had been December, and slept peacefully. At last Gerty fancied she could discern the first faint signs of dawn through the chinks of the shutters, for Mrs Crowther would sleep with the shutters carefully closed. "It must be three o'clock," sighed Gerty, "and I have not slept a wink, and I am so weary."

How nice her own bed must be looking, and how cool, with only a single blanket, and how refreshing the clear morning air streaming into the room.

"It will be broad daylight presently, and surely she cannot be afraid after daylight. Besides, she sleeps so soundly that it really does not matter. I wonder if it is being so stout that makes her so hot. I am sure I could slip away quite quietly, and she will never notice."

Gerty slid gently out of bed, drew on her dressing-gown and her slippers, and then very softly opened the bedroom door and stole out upon the landing. It was still almost quite dark upon the staircase, which was lighted by a cupola from above, and Gerty had taken no candle, for she feared she might disturb her cousin in fumbling for one. But she knew her way well even in the darkness.

Her own room was upon the same storey, but in a far wing of the house, which was an old and rambling one. A winding passage led from the landing upon which Gerty stood to the part of the house where her own room was situated, and between the landing and the passage there was a doorway. Groping for the entrance of the passage Gerty found that the door was shut, much to her surprise, for so rarely was this door shut that Gerty had almost forgotten its existence.

Softly, in case she should disturb any of the sleepers in the adjoining rooms, Gerty felt for the handle and opened the door. As she opened it a blaze of light as from a lantern burst upon her, and a man, a tall, strange man, so at least he seemed, stood before her. Gerty let go the door-handle, started back, and clutched the stair-railing, too terrified even to cry out. The door swung to as she let it go, and she was in darkness again. For a moment, which seemed an age, Gerty clung there, unable either to move or to scream, then there was a sound as of the door being gently pushed open. Gerty's heart stood still. And then a familiar voice whispered softly, "Miss Venables, is it you? I fear I have given you a dreadful fright."

It was the voice of Major Owen, a visitor in the house. The blood coursed freely through Gerty's veins again. She was delivered as from death.

"Yes, yes, it is me," she gasped. "Oh, you have—ah!"

"And my candle has been blown out, but luckily I have some matches here," continued the Major, striking a light, which he applied to the candle in his hand. He was clad in his evening clothes with a smoking-jacket.

"I fell asleep in the smoking-room," he explained, "after all the other fellows left, and I was just finding my way to bed."

"I never got such a fright, never, never," replied Gerty, still gasping.

"I am so awfully sorry, my dear girl, I assure you. See here, take my candle; my room is the third door there. I can't miss it, and there is a lamp in the room."

Gerty took the candle.

"Thank you; good night."

"Good night. Miss Venables——"

"Yes," said Gerty, her hand upon the passage door.

"You must be very much upset. There is a flask in my room. If I may get it, I am sure it would——"

"Oh no ; no, thank you, Major Owen. Good night."

"Good night."

"Major Owen," whispered Gerty, turning back when she was half through the doorway.

"Yes, anything I can——"

"Would you mind seeing me along the passage? I am still so nervous ; it is dreadfully stupid of me, but even with a candle I—I——"

"Why, yes, to be sure. It's no wonder you are scared."

Gerty hurried along the narrow winding passage, followed by the Major. At the door of her own room she turned and handed the Major the candle.

"Now, just wait one moment, please, till I get one of my own candles."

Gerty picked up a candle from her dressing-table with hands that still trembled strangely.

"Now let me light it at yours," she said, turning again to the door.

The Major held out his candle, and Gerty stooped to light hers. She glanced up when she saw that her wick was alight. The Major was gazing down upon her with that strange

wistful look in his kind eyes that exercises so potent a spell upon womankind.

"That's all right now. Thank you so much; good night," and Gerty placed her hand upon the door to close it.

"And am I forgiven?" whispered the Major very very softly, as he clasped the hand in which she held the candle, as though to steady the still uncertain light.

"Yes, fully forgiven."

"Good . . . night."

A moment later Gerty was alone in her room, but confused and trembling. At first she did not realise what had happened, and then suddenly the consciousness rushed in upon her that a man had kissed her.

"Gerty, Gerty, what have you done?" she gasped, as she rushed to the mirror and held up her candle towards it to see if this really was Gerty. And then a still more awful revelation burst upon her. Her dressing-gown had been carelessly pulled on, her hair had escaped from its loose folds and flowed down her back, all except one presumptuous tress which had strayed forward over her shoulder and was playing with her bosom. "Did he, did he," she sobbed, "see me like that? He cannot, he cannot."

Major Owen was a bounder.

Such at least was the reputation which that gallant officer had acquired in the service and among those who had known him longest. A good-looking, unattached man, turned forty, a fine shot, a keen horseman, a fair cricketer, an enthusiastic lawn - tennis player, and an accomplished musician, active, kindly, and obliging, the Major, wherever he wandered to, was always deemed an acquisition to begin with. Then questions began to be asked, and disagreeable rumours followed the Major from stations where he had been quartered before. So two camps were formed, those who credited the reports and dropped the Major, and those who denounced the reports as malicious gossip and stuck to the Major. The latter certainly seemed to have some reason on their side, for the talk against Major Owen was of the vaguest and most unauthentic character. "He was detested," for example, it was said, "by his brother officers." "Everybody at B., where he was stationed before, had cut him, and the place became too hot to hold him, so he got an exchange." But why? Nobody could explain why, and any specific charges were of the flimsiest character. He was very careful in money matters, less ready always to

treat than to be treated; at P. he had sold game given him as a present; he often talked of his investments; he was forward to press his acquaintance upon hospitable houses without waiting for the initiative. It all really came to very little. But the strange thing was that strong as was the initial position of the Major's party, and feeble as seemed the attack, it always happened that in the long-run the attack prevailed. One by one the Major's supporters stepped over into the camp of his detractors, and it was only by shifting frequently to new scenes that he escaped being left boycotted and friendless.

There was one peculiarity about Major Owen which may perhaps partly have accounted for the distrust and dislike of his brother officers. A certain mystery surrounded his personality. Nobody knew where he came from, and he never volunteered information on the matter. He talked sometimes in a vague way of his relatives, but nobody ever saw any of these relatives. Perhaps, however, it is going too far to say that nobody knew the Major's history. There was one officer, a Captain Morgan, who was supposed to do so. But Captain Morgan was an exceedingly reserved man, who disliked

discussing other people and their affairs, and he never committed himself in regard to Major Owen. It was reported, indeed, though nobody could give any authority for the report, that Major Owen was the son of a sometime deceased manure-merchant at Bangor. The only countenance this report ever received from Captain Morgan was on one occasion when Morgan, then a lieutenant, was exceedingly annoyed at the prospect of Owen being posted to his company, and was overheard to mutter that he would rather send in his papers than serve under that "d—d son of a dung-merchant."

Major Owen, as we now find him, has just avoided complete ostracism at York by accepting the adjutancy of a battalion of volunteers in Hampshire. Here, thanks to the popularity of the corps, the hospitality of the district, and his own excellent address and all-round skill at field-sports, he has been exceedingly well received. A whisper, but as yet only a very faint whisper, has followed him from York, and one or two men—his unpopularity always begins with the men—are beginning to shrug their shoulders, but as yet he is still quite in the swim, and is generally regarded as an acquisition at the entertain-

ments given by all the best people in the district.

Among the hospitable mansions where he was received there was none where he was appreciated or where he was more thoroughly at home than at The Elms, the abode of Mr and Mrs Venables. The Venables' were an elderly couple unblessed with children, but otherwise singularly happy in their affairs and in all their domestic arrangements. Mrs Venables was a gentle, retiring little woman, of limited talent and very simple tastes, destitute herself of all initiative, but devoted to her husband, and pleased to fall in with whatever gave him pleasure. Mr Venables, on the other hand, was a man of superabundant energy, youthful spirits, and boyish tastes. He liked the society of young people, and he joined with immense zest, in spirit if not always in body, in all their sports and amusements. He loved to see his lawn thronged with a gay party of tennis-players in the afternoon, and to feel his floor shaking beneath a rattling polka in the evening. In such a household Major Owen was an immense acquisition. He was a handy man, with a perfect genius for organising all kinds of amusements from rounders to amateur theatricals. If a putting-

green had to be laid out, if the tennis-courts had to be marked, if a dancing-cloth had to be stretched or a floor waxed, if "cup" had to be mixed, the Major knew exactly how to do it, and he was always ready, always most pleasant and obliging. The children at a house which he visited in bad weather christened him "the wet-day man." He showed the girls how to make toffee, and he taught the boys conjuring tricks with cards. So Mr Venables found the Major quite a godsend, and before that officer had been six months in the neighbourhood the old gentleman often wondered how his entertainments had been possible before Major Owen came.

Besides the old couple there was no other constant member of the household at The Elms; but Gerty, Mr Venables' niece, was always there when anything was going on,—indeed she must have spent quite half the year at her uncle's. Her mother and sisters resided in London, but Gerty was Mr Venables' favourite niece, and was almost a daughter in the house. The property was destined to pass away to a male relative, but nobody doubted but that a very ample provision would be made for Gerty.

It was the morning after her nocturnal adventure, and Gerty had stolen out early to the flower-garden. Her slumbers had been fitful and restless, and she shrank from the ordeal of good-mornings. The breakfast gong had not yet sounded. She would wait till that was well past, and then she would slip into the dining-room when every one was busy with the meal. She wandered on among the flowers, and tried hard not to think of the night or of the Major, and so it happened that she thought of strawberries; they would be nice, cool, and refreshing. She opened the door of the fruit-garden. All was still, for it was the gardener's breakfast-hour. A net covered the strawberry-beds, and fluttering in one corner Gerty saw an unfortunate black-bird which was caught in the meshes. "Poor little thing!" she exclaimed, "I must set you free." But this was not easily done, for the bird was deeply entangled, and try as she might, Gerty could not free the wings without injuring the prisoner. Absorbed in her task, she did not hear the sound of approaching feet along the garden walk until her attention was arrested by a cheery voice wishing her "Good morning!"

Gerty glanced quickly up. Major Owen was

beside her. In his hand he carried a towel, for he had been down to the river for an early dip, and the shortest way back lay through the garden. The colour flew to Gerty's cheeks, and her eyes fell as they met the keen, cheerful glance of the soldier.

"Good morning!" she stammered. "How you have startled me again—ah," and then feeling that she was running off on thin ice she checked herself, and continued with a forced composure: "Do try, Major Owen, if you can free this poor bird; it's nearly dead with fright, and I am so afraid of hurting it."

The Major dropped his towel upon the strawberry plants, took a penknife from his pocket, and deftly cutting one or two of the strands he freed the bird from the net.

"Now what shall I do with the thief?" he inquired, holding it in his hand. "Execution or reprieve?"

"Oh, let it go, do."

Poor little Gerty, did she half realise that the Major held another bird in his hand?

The blackbird fluttered away among the bushes, and Major Owen and Gerty turned towards the house. At the garden door there was a white moss-rose in luxuriant blossom.

The Major had still his penknife in his hand. He paused, selected a bud, and handed it to Gerty without remark. With a nervous laugh she fastened it at her throat, and they passed together through the garden door, and all the way up to the house they talked of the weather and the prospects of the tennis-party in the afternoon.

Breakfast over, Mr Venables read prayers. The passage from Scripture was Proverbs, chap. xxx., and when he came to the words, "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not : the way of an eagle in the air ; the way of a serpent upon a rock ; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea ; and the way of a man with a maid." Gerty dared not look up. Every eye she felt must be upon her. After prayers Gerty hurried upstairs. She wanted to be alone that morning. She dreaded conversation or remark. On reaching her room she regarded herself in the mirror. The image distressed her. Her face was more pallid than usual in ground colour, and yet her cheeks were flushed, and she fancied she saw lines beneath her eyes which she had never noticed before. Her curly brown hair, usually so carefully and tastefully arranged, was loose

and untidy, and a couple of hairpins were just making their escape.

“What a frump I am; what could I have been thinking of this morning?” she exclaimed, and she threw back her head in indignant self-reproof. Then she noticed the rose nestling beneath her chin. Hastily she pulled it out and glanced at it disdainfully as she held it away from her in her hand. Then she flung it on the floor. For a moment she stood thoughtfully, her fingers pressing her temples. Then she stooped, picked up the bud, and pressed it to her lips. But in an instant her mood changed again, and throwing herself on a chair she slowly and deliberately picked the bud to pieces, petal by petal, blowing away the petals so that they fell into her bath which stood beside the chair. Then, when at last only the bare stalk remained in her hand, she sprang up lightly, tossed it through the open window, and then stooping beside the bath she gaily splashed the water over the floating petals. Humming a merry air, she now pushed both bath and chair to one side and danced a lively skirt-dance. Lightly she skipped about, kicking her heels high in the air with gay abandon, in the unrestrained freedom of her solitude. But

suddenly, in the midst of one of her wildest flings her foot was arrested, the air ceased, Gerty's hands flew to her face, and sobbing bitterly she flung herself upon the bed.

The tennis-party in the afternoon was quite a success. The weather was charming. The turf was in capital order, and, thanks to the assiduity and skill of Major Owen, the courts were never empty; the sets, too, were well arranged, the players being evenly balanced, and the games stubbornly contested. The success of a tennis-party depends largely upon attention to these details, and too often they are neglected. A court stands idle whilst a new set is being made up. Then somebody who is asked to play has left his shoes in the house, and has to go and put them on. Several keen players, who have not been playing for some time, are left standing idle, whilst some one who has just finished a set on the other court is seized at random and asked to play again. The strong players are pitted against the weak ones. The signal for tea is given when sets are nearly finished, and the whole company, except those playing, are marched off to the tea-tables, whither in a few moments the players follow, having finished their sets,

and the courts are thus left tenantless for the time being. But none of these things were possible where Major Owen was master of ceremonies. He knew the form of every local player, and when a stranger appeared he was careful, if possible, to ascertain his form before making up a set. He watched how the games were going in the several courts, and when one side had four or five games he arranged another set to occupy the courts as soon as they were vacant. Those who had been idle longest always had the preference, if they wished to play. Major Owen tried, too, always to arrange the move for tea when sets were beginning, or if this proved impracticable, he would ask certain of the party whom he knew preferred tennis to tea to remain behind and occupy the courts as soon as they were vacant. Many a host, though he understands the game himself, falls far short in these particulars, and so destroys the "go" of the party, and provokes and disappoints the keen spirits of the company; but to a host like Mr Venables, an organiser like Major Owen was a very godsend. There never had been such tennis-parties at The Elms as those which he directed, and indeed throughout the whole district the game seemed to revive under the Major's auspices.

Amongst the guests that day was a Mr Pawson, an acquaintance of Major Owen, who, as he explained, was resident for a few days on business in the district, and to whom Mr Venables had been delighted, at the Major's request, to send a card. Mr Pawson, who was somewhat late of arriving, was not in tennis attire, indeed his get-up was peculiar for an afternoon party. A tall, dark, clean-shaven man, he wore a grey morning coat with abnormally long tails, a white waistcoat, trousers of a bold check, and patent-leather boots. In the centre of a large tie there was a huge diamond pin. A long neck gave scope for an enormous collar of white and blue stripes. The whole was crowned with a low bowler hat, and lavender gloves completed the get-up. So attired Mr Pawson might have passed for a third-rate bookmaker dressed for a wedding, but there was none of the bonhomie of the bookie in his dark, sinister face. "Who is that fellow?" inquired Charlie Trevor, who had just been playing with Gerty. Trevor was a young barrister whose father, a wealthy stockbroker, had a villa in the neighbourhood; he was a great admirer of Gerty's, and until within the last few weeks he had imagined that she looked with favour upon his advances.

Gerty glanced in the direction indicated, and she was struck with surprise. Surely she had seen that face before, and quite recently too, but where?

"That is—no—I really don't know who it is. Oh, I'll tell you, it will be Major Owen's friend; he was to ask some one."

"Gerty, my dear," said her aunt, coming up at this moment, "I want to introduce you to Major Owen's friend; he knows nobody, do take him to have an ice, there's a good child."

Gerty tripped off to be presented to Mr Pawson, and Trevor moved away.

"Did you ever see such a bounder as that fellow there?" remarked Trevor a few minutes later to Captain Laurence, a Militia adjutant, who stood smoking a cigarette.

"Well, he doesn't look an acquisition certainly; where does he come from?"

"I believe Owen asked him."

"Oh, that cad brought him, did he? Just like his impudence," observed Laurence, who had imbibed the service prejudice against Major Owen.

"Yes," said Trevor warmly, "I call it a confounded piece of cheek to bring a counter-jumper like that here."

"Hush, I believe the fellow heard you."

Tea was served on a row of tables on the terrace under the morning-room windows. Pawson sidled towards the house when the general move was made, but he held somewhat aloof from the party, and strolled up and down the terrace examining very closely the creepers which clustered on the walls of the house.

"Oh, Mr Trevor!" exclaimed Gerty, who was busy with the cups, "I'm afraid that gentleman there has not had anything, do ask him if he will have tea or coffee."

"Very good, presently," replied Trevor, with less than his usual alacrity to comply with Gerty's requests; "but there are some ladies here just dying for strawberries."

Had it depended on Trevor, Mr Pawson would probably have gone unattended to, but presently good Mr Venables spied him.

"Oh, Mr—er—a—, I'm afraid you're quite neglected, won't you have some tea? or would you rather come with me to the dining-room and have something better?"

Mr Pawson chose the latter course.

When the two gentlemen emerged from the house a few minutes later the tea-party had dispersed from the tables, all except a few who

had just finished their sets. Major Owen, who had been busy starting fresh sets, was there too, and Gerty was helping him to coffee.

"Oh, Owen!" exclaimed Mr Venables, "your friend has just been telling me that he plays tennis; what a pity he has no shoes, but I am sure it won't harm the grass."

"Couldn't be allowed on any account," replied Major Owen decisively; "but I'll tell you what, there is an extra pair of shoes in my room. Come along, old chap, and we'll see what we can do for you."

Pawson followed Owen into the house.

When the pair returned to the lawn the last laggards had quitted the tea-table, and all who were not playing were gathered at the rendezvous under the trees watching the progress of the game. Mr Pawson had exchanged his patent-leather boots for a pair of tennis-shoes, and Major Owen had lent him a racquet.

"Miss Venables," said the Major, "my friend would like a game. Will you play with him?"

"Certainly; with pleasure," replied Gerty, who had been talking to Trevor.

"And who shall be our opponents? Now

don't give us a couple too strong for us. You know how badly I play," and she glanced askance at Mr Pawson.

"Well, here's Trevor, and there's Miss French. She is available just now, and if you two play them I think it would make a good set."

"Oh, but——" and Gerty hesitated. She was an indifferent player, whilst Miss French was reckoned the strongest lady player in the district; and Trevor, though not quite up to first-class match form, was one of the three or four best players on the lawn.

"Come, Miss Venables," put in Mr Pawson. It was the first time Gerty had heard him speak, except formally. "Let us try them. I do not think we need be so very alarmed."

Trevor bit his lip. He had meant to try and excuse himself from playing in a game which he regarded as a farce, but after a remark like that of Mr Pawson a hot-blooded youth as he was could not refuse the encounter.

Mr Pawson took off his coat, which he laid down very carefully, disclosing shirt-sleeves which matched his collar. Then he took off his gloves, which apparently till then he had

forgotten. Gerty noticed that his hands were singularly small and well formed, and that his fingers were richly jewelled.

"Will you call, Miss Venables?" said Trevor, spinning his racquet.

"Rough."

"It is rough."

"We choose service," said Mr Pawson, without consulting his partner.

Miss French chose a court, and she and Trevor took their places. Gerty had picked up a couple of balls, and was moving towards the service-court; but Mr Pawson anticipated her.

"I think it will be better if I serve first," he observed.

"Oh, do," replied Gerty, surprised, but not sorry to be relieved of the responsibility of opening the game.

Miss French stood well back to receive the service, as all experienced players do when a stranger is opening against them. Mr Pawson served from the extreme outside corner of the court, and, availing himself of his height, he dropped his first ball at a medium pace close to the net at a sharp cross-angle. It was utterly beyond Miss French's reach, and he crossed over to deliver to Trevor. His next

service—a hard one—struck the top of the net and fell back, a fault. Then he served a soft one, and running up to the net he volleyed the return. The ball went spinning back, and lit near the back line between Trevor and Miss French, and just out of the reach of either. Mr Pawson's next two serves were swift and straight, and neither was returned. A love game to begin with.

"Well, he certainly can serve," muttered Trevor; "but we shall see whether he can bat."

Miss French was a strong overhand server, and Gerty failed with one of her returns; but this was the only point the other side scored in the second game. Mr Pawson was everywhere. He "poached" without apology, and his policy had at all events the justification of success. It was Gerty's turn to serve now, and this time Mr Pawson gave a fine exhibition of net-play. A double fault was the only point his opponents made. After this, Trevor and Miss French "lay down," and Mr Pawson and Gerty ran out easily with a love set.

Trevor was provoked and vexed more than he would have cared to admit, and more than an ordinary defeat at tennis would have justi-

fied. But he was a sportsman, and he could not withhold his admiration of his opponent's play.

"You're too good," he remarked, as he pulled on his coat; "far too good for any of us in these parts."

"I can't say as to that," replied Mr Pawson, "but," he continued, with a gracious inclination towards Gerty, "with a reliable partner, I can generally account for two average players." Trevor turned away quickly, biting his lips, and Miss French seethed inwardly.

Mr Pawson did not play again. There was some talk of a men's doubles, but the men excused themselves, and the afternoon was wearing away. Already the sound was heard of wheels gathering on the gravel at the front door, and one or two of the earliest departures were just taking their adieux of Mr Venables when the whole company was startled by the loud report of a gun. It seemed to come from a clump of large trees a few yards away. Everybody started and turned to look in the direction of the sound. The mystery was soon explained, for Major Owen was busy with a camera. He had wished to photograph the company, and he had hit upon this expedient to make the

players pause and to catch everybody looking in the same direction.

It was nearly seven o'clock when the last of the guests took their departure and the house-party wended their way to the house just in time to dress for dinner.

It was not Gerty, for she was half a minute later than the others, and she heard of it upon the stair; but who it was that first made the discovery was never certainly ascertained. Simultaneously, as it seemed, from every corner of the house arose a wild wail. There had been thieves in the house. The jewel-boxes and the drawers in the ladies' rooms had been ransacked—the jewels were gone. There were seven ladies in the house, and not one had escaped. The thieves must have walked off with some £5000 worth of precious stones.

The police were at once communicated with, and every effort was made to get some trace of the thieves; but there was no clue. The theft had evidently been very carefully pre-arranged. The thieves must have known of the tennis-party, and waited their opportunity. They had slipped up, doubtless, among the bushes, and stolen into the house whilst the company were busy with tennis and the

servants were entertaining the coachman party in the hall. It was well known that there was a band of very clever thieves in the neighbourhood. Within the last few weeks a series of burglaries had been committed at country-houses in the district. This case differed from the others in these respects, that the others were all night robberies, where access had been obtained by the use of tools, and they had been directed against the plate-chest rather than the jewel-box.

All the talk that evening, of course, was of the robbery, and the ladies declared that they would none of them sleep one wink for fear. But Major Owen laughingly declared that they might keep their minds quite easy. The house was safer that night than any other house in the district, for it was quite certain that the thieves would not return to a house where they had every reason to expect to find everybody on the *qui vive*. Mr Venables backed up the Major, and even threatened not to lock the doors or bar the windows, as being unnecessary that night. He did not quite mean this, however, and things were secured as usual.

By breakfast-time next morning the spirits

of the ladies had somewhat revived. Each had a story to tell of how she had lain awake half the night, and how at times she had fancied she heard all sorts of mysterious sounds. Mr Venables alone was extremely grave. He had all the appearance of a man whose mind was disturbed with something of which he wished to unburden himself, but which he thought he had perhaps better keep to himself. But the irresponsible chatter of the female tongues was too much for his resolution.

"Well, I'm sure," he broke forth with a testiness of tone quite unusual with him, "I do wish that some of you had had the sense and courage to give the alarm when you heard all these sounds."

"Why, uncle," exclaimed Mrs Crowther, "and disturb the whole house for nothing?"

"Nothing!" exclaimed Mr Venables. "Is it nothing that the house has been broken into a second time during the night, and all my best plate is gone? Is that nothing?"

It was true. Burglars had been in the house during the night. Access had apparently been obtained by filing a bar which held the shutter in the gun-room on the ground floor. The thieves must have been accurately informed as

to the arrangements of the house, for nothing had been touched except the plate-chest which stood in the butler's pantry and the sideboard in the dining-room, both of which had been ransacked.

Digby, an experienced detective from Scotland Yard, had been down several times in the district within the last day or two investigating the robberies which had occurred in the neighbourhood. He was to be down from town again that morning, and the police had promised to bring him to The Elms as soon as he arrived. Meantime orders were given by Mr Venables that nothing was to be touched in the gun-room till he came. There was not long to wait, for a few minutes after ten o'clock Digby and the local Inspector of Police drove up to the door. Mr Venables met them in the hall.

"Good morning, sir," said Cummings, the Inspector. "This is Mr Digby from Scotland Yard, come to inquire about the robbery yesterday."

"The robberies, I suppose, you mean," replied Mr Venables. "Doubtless you have heard that there has been another since I saw you?"

"Another robbery in the district!" exclaimed

Cummings. "No, I have not heard of it. I was not at the station this morning, as I had to go over to Powton about a suicide; but what house has been robbed?"

"What house?" replied Mr Venables sharply. "Why, this house to be sure. Broken into twice within eight hours, and we pay police taxes."

Even Digby started at this statement.

"Do you mean to tell me," he inquired, "that this house has been broken into again since the robbery yesterday afternoon of which I had particulars?"

Mr Venables told the story of the nocturnal house-breaking, and they went to the gun-room.

Digby was a middle-aged man, tall and thin, and of dark complexion. His expression indicated caution and cunning rather perhaps than extreme acuteness, but his eye was sharp and piercing, and he fixed it upon everybody he addressed in an aggressive manner, however innocent might be the purport of his conversation.

Inspector Cummings, on the other hand, was a fair-complexioned man of about thirty-five, open-faced and bright-eyed, wiry in figure, and brisk and active in all his movements.

The two men examined the window very

carefully. Then they peered about the floor of the room. Next they went round to the outside and examined the gravel and the walk, and finally they returned to the gun-room and again looked very closely at the window and searched the floor. Whilst this investigation was going on hardly a word was exchanged between the two. When it was concluded, Digby led the Inspector aside to a corner of the room, and the two men conversed together in an undertone.

“Observed anything?” began Digby in the superior tone of a man who has noted everything and drawn all the right inferences, and who merely wants to see if his pupil is at all promising.

“The glass was broken from the inside,” replied Cummings, “and nobody climbed out of the window after it was broken.”

“Which you infer from?”

“From the fact that all the fragments are on the outside, and some of them have been driven out with some force, as they are several feet from the window. There are two or three pieces on the outer window-sill which would almost certainly have been brushed off by anybody climbing out.”

“Anything else?”

"The bar was not fastened when it was being severed."

"And that you gather?"

"The break does not correspond by about an eighth of an inch with the opening between the two leaves of the shutter, and the filings on the floor are about two feet from the wall."

"That all?"

"Apart from that, it is clear that the bar was not filed through from the outside to get the window open. The filing goes only three-quarters through, and then the severance of the two pieces was completed by a break."

"And do you draw any further inference from these facts?" asked the detective, who was busy with his pencil and note-book.

"Only two very obvious ones. Access was obtained in some other way. Some party in the house was implicated in the matter, for otherwise there was no object in creating a false impression as to how the house was entered."

"Inspector," said Digby, shutting his note-book, "you are not far off the mark so far as you go."

The great man apparently deemed it inexpedient to confide how much further he himself went.

The next step taken by the officials was to make a very careful examination of all the other possible places and modes of access to or exits from the house. At none of the windows or doors on the basement storey was any trace of a possible entry discovered. The doors were carefully tried, and when they were properly fastened and locked they made so much noise in the opening that it seemed unlikely that, even with a fellow-conspirator inside, thieves would risk an entry to the house in this way.

Four gardeners were busy trimming and nailing up a creeper which grew on the wall of the house.

"You didn't begin this job to-day?" inquired Cummings.

"No," replied one of the gardeners, "we have been at it off and on for three days."

"And that ladder, where do you leave it at night?"

"Oh, just wherever we are working. Nobody is likely to run away with a ladder, although there do seem to be thieves about."

"Did you find it this morning where you left it last night?"

"Well, not exactly; somebody had been

meddling with it. It was in its right place, but it was turned upside down."

This was an important clue, and the two officers now examined the windows which the ladder might have reached. The drawing-room was on the first floor, and its windows opened on to a balcony. The balustrade of this balcony was covered with ivy, and the quick eye of Inspector Cummings soon detected a spot where the leaves and the young shoots were crushed and bruised, as might have been done by a ladder leaning upon them. On the turf below this spot there were two dents or depressions such as the feet of a ladder with weight upon it would be sure to make. There could be no doubt, therefore, that the thieves had obtained access to the house by climbing to this balcony and then gaining admission to the house by the drawing-room window, which some one from the inside had opened.

Suspicion fell, of course, upon the servants. Digby was satisfied that one of them was implicated, and the most searching inquiries were made into their antecedents, but nothing incriminating was elicited. As one of them must have been concerned, Mr Venables contemplated dispensing with the services of all

in order to make sure that his house no longer harboured the thief. Major Owen strongly recommended this course, but Mr Venables' humane disposition shrank from it, and Digby did not encourage it, as he felt that it would diminish the chance of ultimately discovering the criminal.

Ten days had elapsed and no clue had been discovered. Digby had returned to town. But Inspector Cummings was still upon the alert. He had applied for and obtained a bundle of photographs of notorious thieves recently released from confinement. This bundle lay on his table, and he was busily turning them over one forenoon and closely scrutinising each face to see if he could recognise it as one recently seen by himself in the neighbourhood, when Mr Trevor walked in to report a garden robbery which had taken place the previous evening at his father's residence. The Inspector brought out his note-book and jotted down the particulars of the robbery as Trevor related them.

When this business was concluded Trevor made some remark upon the photographs lying on the table before him, and the conversation turned upon photography. Trevor was an

amateur, and the Inspector, whose brother was a photographer, was also interested.

"By the way," said Trevor, "I saw a photograph developed by a new process. Major Owen, the new adjutant, had taken it."

"Indeed; figures or landscape?"

"Both in a way—it was a tennis-party at The Elms."

"Oh, The Elms," said the Inspector, who, curiously enough, had not been informed of the photography incident of the fateful afternoon. "When was it taken?"

"Oh, I daresay it will be ten days ago now. It was the afternoon of the robbery there. By the way, have you found out anything about that affair, if I may ask?"

"Certainly you may ask, but unfortunately there is nothing to tell. But this photograph, what was peculiar about the process?"

Trevor described it.

"Do you know," said the Inspector, "now that you have described the process I should like very much to see that photo."

"Why, certainly, I shall be delighted. I shall bring it the first time I am passing, if I remember."

"I expect my brother here to-night, and I should like to show it to him," said the In-

spector. "Perhaps you will kindly hand it to the constable whom I shall send over to examine the footprints in the garden."

This was accordingly arranged.

"If you will call to-morrow," said the Inspector as Trevor rose to go, "I hope to be able to report progress about the fruit."

"So soon?"

"So soon, or not at all. It is so with garden robberies."

"Very good. I shall call to-morrow forenoon."

Next day Trevor called at the police-office as he had promised, and the report was most satisfactory. The garden robbers had been in a hurry to sample the fruit they had taken, and the police had been able to track them for about a mile along a byroad by the stalks, husks, and hard pieces which had been thrown away. The trail led to a cottage, where on search being made nearly a hundredweight of fruit was found stowed away in a barrel. The case was so plain that the two sons of the cottager owned up, doubtless to save their father, who had been engaged in the theft as well as they, and who feared eviction in case of detection, for his landlord was a friend of Mr Trevor's.

"I was much obliged," said the Inspector when he had explained all this, "for the photograph you sent me. The process seems quite new. But, by the way, there are some photographs here I would like you to look at. Just cast your eye over these and tell me if you think you recognise any one."

The Inspector handed a bundle of photographs to Trevor, who began to examine them. One by one he flung them down, until at last he came to one which he glanced at a second time. Then he flung it down also. But anon he picked it up again and scrutinised it very carefully, turning it all round and examining the back of it where a name was written.

"Joshua Lapsley or Aubyn St Clair. Who was he?"

"Oh! that is a notorious and very clever thief. He has just done five years for the Bath Hotel robbery, and we shall hear of him before long I make no manner of doubt."

Again Trevor looked at the photo very hard for a moment, but then he laughed and put it down and resumed his examination of the others. When he had gone over them, flinging down the last of the bunch, he exclaimed—

"No, I can't say I recognise any one."

But even as he said this he was picking up Lapsley's photo, which he scrutinised again very closely.

"It is funny, isn't it, how one fancies at times that one sees resemblances," he remarked as at last he flung it down again.

"Resemblances are not always fancies," replied the Inspector cautiously, "otherwise photography would be useless for our purpose. But whom do you think Lapsley like?"

"Oh, it's only an absurd notion, but I thought him very like a fellow I met casually at an afternoon party the other day."

"In this neighbourhood?" inquired the Inspector quietly.

"Yes, at The Elms."

"Ah, the party on Tuesday a week past?"

"Yes, the day of the robbery there, you know."

The Inspector picked up the photo and glanced at it carelessly; then, still holding it in his hand, he caught Trevor's eye and looked at him steadily and interrogatively.

"Yes," he said slowly, "the day of the robbery. How very odd!"

The association of ideas had not presented

itself to Trevor's mind before, and it startled him.

"Oh! of course I don't suggest that man was there," he exclaimed with a forced laugh, pointing to the photo, "only a sort of resemblance struck me."

"What was the gentleman's name?" inquired the Inspector.

"Well, I really forget: let me see, I believe it was Pawson. He was a friend of Major Owen's, I believe, and all I know about him is that he was a wonderfully good tennis-player."

"A friend of Major Owen's, you say?"

"Yes, so I understand."

"And staying where?"

"'Pon my word, I don't know. You know as much about him as I do now, except that it struck me in a vague way that the man was not a gentleman; but then that didn't surprise me, seeing he was Major Owen's friend."

"You don't like Major Owen?"

"No, I hate—that is, I think him a cad."

"Well, that's putting it strongly. What do you know against the Major?"

"Well," replied Trevor with some hesitation, "nothing personally exactly, but I have been told he is a cad, and I can't help somehow feeling every time I meet him that it is true,

though I must say he has always been very civil and obliging to me."

"By the way," inquired the Inspector, "here is the photograph of that very tennis-party. Were all the company taken?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Then will you kindly point me out Mr Pawson?"

Trevor looked at the group carelessly at first, but then, not finding what he wanted, he examined it very carefully figure by figure.

"I cannot find him," he remarked, and, after another look, "I am sure he is not there."

"Pardon me," replied the Inspector, "I think I can promise to point him out to you."

"In that photo?"

"Yes, in that photo."

"Well, you will surprise me if you keep that promise. Where is he?"

The Inspector opened a drawer and took out a magnifying-glass. He held it over the photo for a moment and then, having found what he wanted, he handed it to Trevor. The camera had been placed close to the house, and a corner of the house appeared in the foreground on the left.

"Do you see that open window?"

"Yes."

"What room is that, can you tell me?"

"I think it is a bedroom, but I am not sure."

"Now, I want you to look very closely with the glass at that open window and tell me if you can make out anything inside the room."

Trevor studied the photo closely through the glass.

"I see close to the window a table with a looking-glass. A man is standing beside it, and he seems to be examining something he has in one of his hands. He holds what looks like an open box in his other hand."

"Now tell me, do you recognise the man?"

Trevor looked still more closely for a moment, and then replied deliberately—

"I do."

"Have I kept my promise?"

"You have."

Satisfied that he was now upon the track, Inspector Cummings requested Scotland Yard to endeavour to secure the arrest of Mr Pawson, *alias* Joshua Lapsley. Several days however elapsed and nothing was heard of him. Meantime the Inspector caused a careful watch to be kept upon the railway station, and one forenoon he received intimation that Major Owen had taken a ticket for London. The Inspector

hurried to the station, but the train was gone. There was another in about three-quarters of an hour. The Inspector wired to Scotland Yard to have the Major watched, and touch to be kept by the watchers with Scotland Yard. He took the next train to town, and on reporting himself at Scotland Yard he learned that Major Owen had been traced to Piccadilly, where he had met a friend, and the two were now believed to be lunching in a restaurant there. The Inspector took a hansom to Piccadilly and stationed himself on the south side of that thoroughfare in view of the door of the restaurant. He had not long to wait, for in about a quarter of an hour Major Owen emerged in company with a man whom, notwithstanding sundry disguises, the Inspector was satisfied was no other than the redoubtable Joshua. Together the friends strolled eastwards along Piccadilly until they reached the Circus. There at the corner they stood for some time in earnest conversation. Then they parted. Major Owen turned up Regent Street. Lapsley crossed towards the island. For a moment the Inspector doubted which to follow, but instinct guided him to attach himself to Major Owen. The latter had gone only a few yards when he stopped and hailed a hansom.

The Inspector hailed another, and directed the driver to follow the Major's. Meanwhile, what of Lapsley?

Even whilst he and the Major stood talking at the corner his quick eye had lighted for a moment upon the Inspector standing a few yards off and making to light a cigarette. As he crossed to the island he glanced back once or twice, and when he reached that haven he paused and his eye followed the Major till he hailed his hansom. Then, as the Inspector hailed his, Lapsley did likewise, and so it happened that there was a procession of three hansoms up Regent Street.

The three hansoms at last drew up in a quiet street in St John's Wood. Major Owen stepped down, paid the cabby, rang a bell, and entered a house. The Inspector, too, dismissed his hansom, and entering a doorway made a pretence of ringing a bell, then as the hansoms disappeared he stepped out on to the street and stationed himself where he could watch the door by which Major Owen had entered without being observed from the house. Lapsley did not dismount from his hansom. He waited a moment until he saw that the Inspector had taken station, and then he directed his cabby to turn and drive away.

The Inspector had to wait for nearly an hour before anything stirred at the house which he had under observation. Then a telegraph boy arrived with a telegram which he delivered. The Inspector hailed the boy as he passed him.

"Is this Rye Street," he inquired.

"Yes," said the boy.

"Let me see; I think it was 103 the number I got—which way is that?"

"103; that's the house I have been at,—there on the right."

"I think that was the number, and the name, let me see?"

"Bowker?" suggested the boy.

"The very same name; thank you, that's all right."

For an hour longer the Inspector lingered upon his watch, but nobody approached or quitted the house, and the Inspector began to think it was time to make a move. People in the neighbouring houses were beginning to eye him suspiciously from the windows. So at last he walked up to the door of number 103 and rang the bell. It was answered by a slim untidy girl.

"Is Mr Bowker in?"

"No."

“Has he just left?”

“He has not been here to-day.”

“Indeed; I had an appointment with him, I shall just wait.”

“I must ask Madame,” replied the girl, “she is upstairs.”

“That’s all right,” replied the Inspector, forcing himself in. “I’ll just step in here and wait,” and he advanced and entered the parlour, the door of which stood open.

The girl hesitated, then slowly shut the front door and went upstairs, from which direction an angry female voice was presently heard.

The Inspector hastily surveyed the room. It was a barely furnished apartment, looking out to the back. There were no documents about. The press contained only a few glasses, the drawers of the table were empty. There was a blotting-book, and the Inspector removed the used leaves and thrust them into his pocket. There was no fire, but the coals were set in the grate. On the top of the coals there were one or two crumpled bits of papers. These the Inspector picked up and carefully examined. The only fresh-looking one was a telegram. The Inspector straightened it out and read :—

“BOWKER, 103 *Rye Street*.

“Under observation front. Take utensils back. Meet St Jean 9.”

The Inspector again looked carefully out of the window. It was plain that there was an access to the house at the back. A small yard was bounded by a wall in which there was a door opening apparently into a lane. Then the Inspector interpreted the telegram as follows :—

“The house is under observation from the front street. Take something (it might be booty, it might be documents, or tools) out by the back way. Meet me at St Jean at nine to-night.”

But where was St Jean? Clearly the bird had flown, and there was not much more to be done here in the meantime; but it might be well to learn a little more about the establishment. The Inspector opened the door of the parlour; he would step quietly upstairs and inform whoever he found there that he was unable to remain longer. But half-way upstairs the girl met him.

“Madame thinks you had better leave, as she does not expect Mr Bowker here to-night.”

"Odd that he should have failed me, but I think I shall just explain to Madame——"

But the girl barred the way.

"Madame is indisposed, you cannot see her."

The Inspector had no warrant, and no excuse for pressing further, so he took his departure.

But what about this St Jean? He found a branch post-office and set himself to consult the directory. But he could get no light. The Inspector had enough French to know that St Jean stands in French for St John. There were plenty of St Johns, and no doubt by arrangement St Jean might stand for any of them. Still the idea did not satisfy him, and on that theory the quest seemed hopeless. "St Jean—— There's something running in my mind, something when I was at school, 'called by the French St Jean, was fought on a Sunday,' it went on. Now what was fought on a Sunday? The Battle of Waterloo—yes, that was it. I remember now how that chapter began. 'The Battle of Waterloo, called by the French St Jean, was fought on a Sunday.'"

The Inspector took the bus to Waterloo Station, where he had something to eat in the refreshment-room.

A few minutes before nine Major Owen,

carrying a large suit-case in his hand, stepped out of a hansom which drew up at the station. He entered the station and repaired to the booking-office. There were a considerable number of people pressing forward for tickets, and the Major placed his suit-case on a handbarrow which stood near, as he went forward to the desk. The moment his back was turned the case was snapped up by another man who suddenly darted out from behind a pillar. But in an instant the thief was seized by the arm. "Here, not so fast—where are you going with the gentleman's bag?"

It was Detective Digby, and he had seized Inspector Cummings. The Inspector had taken a daring course. He had no warrant, no superior advice, he was not even a police-officer within his own bounds. He could not arrest Major Owen, and yet determined to secure what he was convinced would contain evidence of guilt if not the stolen property, he had boldly seized the bag, only to be seized himself by the always watchful Digby, who, failing to recognise his Hampshire friend or to hear his confused protestations in the general hubbub, at once handed him over to a couple of policemen who came hurrying up. Major Owen having taken his ticket and seeing what

had happened, pushed forward to claim his luggage.

"Your bag, sir? Yes, I have just caught the fellow making off with it."

"Give it me."

"Certainly, sir; in good time, sir; but you must accompany me to the Police Station to give particulars."

"Bother, I have no time for that; give me the bag."

Digby might have yielded and been content to take the name and address of the stranger, but Cummings saw that the case was desperate.

"Here, I say, don't give him the bag; it's not his bag, I protest. Don't you know me, Mr Digby?"

"Know you. Who are you?"

"Inspector Cummings, Hampshire Constabulary. You saw me ten days ago."

"So it is; but, hulloa, where is that gentleman?"

A hand from out the crowd had touched Major Owen on the shoulder; a voice had whispered a word in his ear, and he was gone.

In vain Digby searched for him. The suitcase remained unclaimed. So, after some delay and sundry explanations, the policemen

were dispensed with, and Digby took Cummings and his prize to the Police Station. When on the following day, the necessary authority having been obtained, the suit-case was opened, it was found to contain, in addition to some articles of male attire, a number of the pieces of jewellery stolen from Mr Venables' house, as well as housebreaker's tools.

Major Owen disappeared. No trace of him was to be found in Hampshire, or in London, or elsewhere. No clue was obtainable at St John's Wood, though there was a lady there who it was supposed could have told something. Where the Major went, where he is now, and whether he will reappear, nobody professes to know.

Lapsley managed to evade the vigilance of the law for nearly twelve months longer; but at last he was laid by the heels in a daring hotel robbery. He is now doing time at Dartmoor.

Mr and Mrs Trevor are very happy, and Mrs Trevor has no secrets from her husband. Yes, by the way, she has one—a kiss.

TORRANCE *v.* TEACHER.

A CASE which, not to give any secrets away shall be called *Torrance v. Teacher*, was decided in the Court of Session more than sixty years ago, and is duly reported in the then current series of decisions which bear the name of "*Dunlop*." The case involved no matter of general public interest. It was a somewhat technical question about the date of vesting of the interest under a will. Under a certain testator's will a sum of money was to go to one Bruce on the expiry of a life interest. Bruce died before the person who enjoyed the life interest, leaving a will in favour of Teacher. The question was whether the legacy had vested in Bruce so as to pass under his will to Teacher, or whether it had lapsed so as to entitle Torrance as the residuary legatee of the original testator to get the

money. Eventually the case was decided in favour of Teacher. Torrance, who was a schoolmaster in Ayrshire, took the matter much to heart. Fortunately he had benefited otherwise as residuary legatee, he was in easy circumstances, and was able to retire and remove to Glasgow. But this litigation had been the culminating interest of his life, and he never ceased to brood over the loss of his case, and to reproach himself for having been persuaded not to appeal to the House of Lords. He died some time in the fifties.

Saxby sat in his chambers in Castle Street, Edinburgh, contemplating the fire. It was four of the afternoon. Business was not brisk, for Saxby was a young beginner on his own account, so business was seldom brisk, and for the time being there was absolutely nothing to do. Should he adjourn to the University Club and make up a bridge party, or should he wait on for another half hour in case that long-expected new client should at last arrive? Another cigarette might help towards the solution of that problem. He took one from his case and placed it between his lips, but his match-holder was empty, and he lazily rose to get a match from a box upon the mantel-

piece. As he struck a light his eye turned towards the door, and he realised that he was not alone. Near the door, which was already closed, stood a benevolent-looking old gentleman, bald of head and somewhat florid of complexion, clothed in rather shiny broad-cloth, a weather-beaten old hat in one hand, and an equally venerable gingham umbrella in the other.

"Good afternoon," said the old gentleman.

"Anything I can do for you," replied Saxby sharply, for he smelt an appeal to his charity.

"May I have a few words with you about an important family litigation? A sum of some £10,000 is involved."

"Certainly, sir, certainly; pray be seated," exclaimed Saxby, throwing his cigarette into the fire and motioning the old gentleman towards a chair.

Mr Witham, for such was the old gentleman's name, explained the purpose of his visit. It appeared that a brother of his had recently died, who had the life interest in a sum of £10,000 bequeathed by an uncle to the brother for life, and on his death to his son, Mr Witham's nephew. The nephew had predeceased his father, leaving one son, a young

child. The question was whether this grand-nephew of Mr Witham's, or Mr Witham himself as residuary legatee of the testator, was now entitled to this fund. Had it vested in his nephew, the boy's father? The matter was purely a family and friendly one. The boy was otherwise amply provided for, but it was desirable that the question should be settled by an authoritative judgment of the Court. Mr Witham had been informed that there was a speedy and convenient method of obtaining such a judgment by presenting a special case to one of the Divisions of the Court of Session. Was that so?

Yes, it was so. Saxby saw no difficulty in having the matter so disposed of, and he would be very glad to take it up on Mr Witham's behalf.

"On both our behalfs, Mr Saxby," said Mr Witham. "The matter is entirely friendly. You will act for both of us."

"That will hardly do," exclaimed Saxby. "In the case of a person not of full age the Court would not countenance the idea of the same solicitor acting both for him and for the other party with an adverse interest."

Mr Witham's face fell.

"It is a pity, no doubt," continued Saxby,

"to have to incur the expense of another law agent, but I fear that in the circumstances it cannot be avoided."

"The expense is nothing, a little money is no object," replied Mr Witham, "if the thing can be arranged. Can you arrange it?"

"Certainly, there will be no difficulty about that. Who is the boy's guardian?"

"His parents are both dead. I am his guardian."

"If that is so he must have an independent guardian for the case."

"Another complication! Can you arrange this also?" asked Mr Witham anxiously.

"Yes, the Court when the case is presented to them will appoint somebody, probably a young advocate, to act as *curator ad litem* for the lad."

Saxby took down a number of further particulars in regard to the case.

"By the way," he remarked when he had got all the other necessary information, "I have not got your own address."

"I live in Partick," replied Mr Witham.

"And the street? it must be stated in the case."

"202 Gargoyle Terrace," said Mr Witham

slowly, "but there is a little difficulty about that. I do not wish you to address letters to me there."

"Indeed, why?"

"Well, you see my wife is a very nervous woman, and she has one fault, nobody is perfect—she is very inquisitive. I could not keep letters from her, and I know it would make her anxious and distressed to believe that I was engaged in a lawsuit with Archy; she is very fond of Archy. Women do not understand business matters."

"I see," said Saxby; "then how am I to communicate with you?"

"There will be no need. I am very frequently in Edinburgh, and if I may I shall look in here from time to time to see how matters progress."

Mr Witham rose to go.

"There is just one other matter which I think I ought to mention," he began, in a hesitating way. "A young lawyer's clerk to whom I showed the will mentioned to me the name of a case which he said he feared was against me. The name was—let me see—Torrance against Teacher; yes, Torrance against Teacher, some fifty years ago, I think, he said."

Mr Saxby made a note of the name of the case, and promised to look it up.

"I am afraid," said Mr Witham, "you will find that it is against me, but my friend told me that decisions are sometimes overruled."

"That does happen," replied Saxby.

"It will happen here. Good afternoon," said Mr Witham.

Saxby soon set about the arrangements for the case. One of the first duties was to secure a solicitor to act for young Archibald Witham. Here arose in Saxby's mind a conflict between benevolence and interest. There was little Martin, a solicitor, whose office door was opposite Saxby's in the same building. He had been a clerk in the same office in which Saxby had served his apprenticeship, but now, like Saxby, he had set up for himself, and he was finding that business did not flow to his office in the way which he had expected. Unlike Saxby, he had a wife and two children, and just the other day Saxby had promised to send him anything which by any chance he could not himself undertake. But there was nothing to be made out of Martin—it would be pure benevolence,—and business was so slack that Saxby felt he could not afford to be benevo-

lent. Then there was not five minutes' walk away the office of the well-known firm of Mackay, Wilson, & Spens, Writers to the Signet, perhaps the largest legal business in Edinburgh, from whose ample table there must be many dropping crumbs. To be in a position to put a piece of business their way—the idea made Saxby start when it first crossed his mind, but the longer he thought of it the better he liked it. Clearly there were great possibilities here. So to Mackay, Wilson, & Spens went Saxby and interviewed Mr Fox, their Parliament House man, whose reception of the new patron, though he undertook the business, was less effusively cordial than Saxby had hoped.

Then there was that case of *Torrance v. Teacher* to look up. Yes, Mr Witham's friend was quite right. The case was directly in point and clearly adverse to Mr Witham. Saxby wondered if it was his duty to tell the other side about the case, but all anxiety about this was removed when he met Mr Fox a few days afterwards, and the latter told him that there was nothing in Witham's case, as the point had been decided fifty years ago in *Torrance v. Teacher*.

A week or two after his first interview Mr Witham again called upon Saxby. Every-

thing, he was assured, was now in train for the preparation of the case and its presentation to the Court. The only doubt, as Saxby told Mr Witham, was in regard to that case of *Torrance v. Teacher*, which certainly seemed exactly in point. Would Mr Witham like to have an opinion of counsel taken before incurring the expense of the litigation with that adverse decision in his face? "No," said Mr Witham, "I shall not be moved by any opinion. The case must go on in any event. And as to *Torrance against Teacher*, that will be overruled. Decisions are overruled, you know."

"Yes, sometimes," replied Saxby, "but it is rather an off-chance to begin a case in that expectation."

"Never mind, it will happen here; take my word for it, *Torrance against Teacher* will be overruled," said the sanguine old gentleman.

The preparation of the pleadings was duly proceeded with, and when these were adjusted the case was printed and presented to the First Division of the Court of Session. Three or four months, however, elapsed before the case appeared upon the rolls for hearing.

Mr Witham called occasionally upon Saxby to learn the prospects of the case being reached. No money had yet passed between them, and

Saxby, whose bank account was not in too satisfactory a state, would gladly have had a payment to account to meet counsel's fees, paid in advance according to Scottish custom, and other outlays. But when he ventured to hint something of the kind, Mr Witham looked so pained that Saxby did not press the subject or again recur to it.

At last the day of hearing arrived, and when Saxby entered the court-room Mr Witham had already found a seat for himself on one of the back benches. Instructions had been given by Mr Witham that no expense was to be spared in having the case argued, and so eminent counsel were engaged on both sides. Mr Witham had the services of the Lord Advocate, his nephew those of the Dean of Faculty.

At the conclusion of the arguments, which lasted the greater part of the day, the Court intimated that they reserved judgment (*Scottice*, "made avizandum with the cause").

"What is your impression?" inquired Mr Witham of the Lord Advocate, to whom Saxby had introduced him on leaving the court-room.

"Well, I did not think we would be able to stand up as long as we have done in the face of Torrance against Teacher. They can't get over it, but evidently they don't like it."

"Torrance against Teacher will be overruled," said Mr Witham decisively.

"Let us hope so. Good afternoon," smiled the Lord Advocate.

A few weeks later, on examining the rolls of Court to see if *Special Case Witham* was on the roll for judgment, Saxby found instead the following entry: "Special case, Witham and another. *For an order.*"

Saxby knew well what this meant. In the Court of Session, when a Division of the Court before which a case has been argued is equally divided in opinion, or when there is a previous decision, of which the present Court disapprove, in the way of their deciding the case before them according to their own views, or where a point is novel and important and the Court are not clear about it, the case may be ordered to be reargued before seven judges. The case of Witham being put out on the roll "For an order" instead of for judgment, showed Saxby that an order would be pronounced to have the case reheard before seven judges. So it happened next morning, and so Saxby informed Mr Witham when he called later in the forenoon.

"That is just as I expected," remarked Mr

Witham. "Torrance against Teacher will be overruled."

Three weeks later the case was reheard before seven judges, and at the conclusion of the argument judgment was again reserved. But at last the day for final decision arrived, and by five to two the judges decided in favour of Mr Witham. The head-note of the report of the case, after stating the question raised and the result, bears further, "*Torrance v. Teacher overruled.*"

Saxby looked in vain for Mr Witham after the judgment had been pronounced. He had been in his usual place on the back benches when the Court assembled. Doubtless for some reason he had been obliged to slip away hurriedly at the end—perhaps to catch his train.

As the costs of both parties had, in accordance with the usual custom in such cases, to be paid out of the fund in dispute which had been awarded to Mr Witham, Messrs Mackay, Wilson, & Spens rendered to Saxby their account, amounting to £83. There was the printer, too, to pay, and certain other dues. Saxby sat with Messrs Mackay, Wilson, & Spens' account in his hand scrutinising the details.

"H'm, yes, fully charged, or it would not be Mackay, Wilson, & Spens; but it is just as well; it will enable me to pile it on myself. The old gentleman might grumble if my account were much more than theirs. Let me see, with the outlays it will run up to fully £200 for both sides. But what of that? £200 out of £10,000; he's devilish well off."

A movement at the doorway caused Saxby to turn round. Mr Witham was just entering.

"Ha, Mr Witham, good afternoon; hope you are well. I expected to see you before this to have an opportunity of congratulating you. It came off splendidly."

"Yes. I am deeply thankful Torrance against Teacher is overruled. That does take a weight off my mind, and I am very grateful to you, Mr Saxby. I felt that I must thank you personally."

"Something more than my bare fees," thought Saxby hopefully. "You are very good, very good indeed. By the way, I have just got Mackay, Wilson, & Spens' account; I suppose you would like that settled. Some £83 it comes to."

Mr Witham's face fell. "I leave that to you, Mr Saxby," he replied slowly.

"Er — yes, of course," continued Saxby.

"That will be all right. Do you, by the way, wish me to take the necessary steps to realise the legacy?"

Mr Witham's face fell still further.

"Mr Saxby, there is no legacy," he replied very slowly.

Saxby started. Was the old gentleman's mind getting unhinged? "I really don't quite follow."

"No," rejoined Mr Witham. "Do you know, I had hoped you were beginning to realise the truth, or, at all events, that you had so entered into the spirit of the thing as to lose count of any material consequences."

"I am quite at a loss to understand what you mean, Mr Witham. I am afraid you are somewhat indisposed to-day."

"No, that is not possible *now*; but I am so sorry that my communication seems to put you about."

"Mr Witham," began Saxby deliberately.

"That is not my name."

"Not your name."

"No, nor anybody's name, so far as I know. There is no such person."

"No such person!"

"No, and there is no grand-nephew and no

legacy of £10,000 or any other sum. The whole thing is suppositious."

"What!" shrieked Saxby. "What do you mean? Who the devil are you?"

"Thomas Torrance."

"Thomas Torrance! Fiddlesticks! Torrance must have been dead forty years ago. You are an impudent impost——"

But the word froze on Saxby's lips, for he realised that he was alone.

A STRANGE RENCONTRE.

A FEW years ago the public of Scotland were made familiar with the particulars of a divorce case which was of the most conventional character, and excited notice only because the parties belonged to a class of society in which in Scotland divorce is rare—the upper middle class. The facts of the case, which was an undefended one, were as follows:—

The husband, M., a civil engineer in Glasgow, resided during the summer months with his wife and children in a villa residence at L., on the Clyde. Having been called upon one occasion to London as a witness before a Parliamentary Committee, he was detained there for several weeks. On his return he was led to make inquiries about the frequent visits to his house during his absence of a Dr N., an old friend of his wife, with whom

he was himself unacquainted. The result of these inquiries was divorce proceedings by M. against his wife. Decree of divorce was granted.

There was one passage in the evidence of one of the servants which is of interest, as bearing upon the following narrative: "I recollect," she said, "one day, three or four days before Mr M. returned home, a stranger gentleman called and asked for Mr M. I did not know the gentleman. I had never seen him before, and I forget what name he gave. When I told him Mr M. was from home, he seemed much disappointed, and he asked for Mrs M. At that time Mrs M. and Dr N. were in the drawing-room. I showed the stranger gentleman in. Mrs M. and Dr N. were sitting together on the sofa when I opened the door. Dr N. had hold of Mrs M.'s hand. Mrs M. jumped up and looked confused, but I did not catch what she said. The stranger gentleman stayed only a few minutes. I showed him out. He seemed annoyed. He asked when Mr M. was expected home. I did not know. He then asked if I knew Mr M.'s address, and I said I had seen letters addressed 'Grand Hotel, London.'"

Some years later, at the Hôtel Beau Rivage, Ouchy, I met M., who has now retired from business, and generally resides abroad. After dinner in the smoking-room the conversation among a small party of English and American visitors turned upon "Death Wraiths"—the immediate occasion of the discussion being an article, "Where are the Letters," by Mr Taylor Innes, in 'The Nineteenth Century.' There is generally a sceptic present at such discussions, but this occasion was an exception, for the only sceptic who was a party to the argument was the absent Mr Taylor Innes. Various theories were propounded, but the talkers were all on the side of the angels, and they all agreed, if in nothing else, in disagreeing with Mr Taylor Innes. There was, however, one difficulty which all admitted. On a psychical theory of the universe the appearance of wraiths at deaths is not impossible, or even perhaps very improbable. But the wraiths do not always appear at the hour of death; sometimes they come days before, and it is hard to explain upon any theory at once hyperphysical and rational how or why the wraith of somebody who is still alive and perhaps well, but is to die to-morrow or next day—it may be by pure accident—should manifest itself to an absent friend.

Coffee and cigars had been discussed, the party had broken up, and I strolled out with M. in the moonlight along the border of the lake. It was a lovely evening, and as we had not met for years, he had many things to tell me about his travels, and still more to ask about his friends at home. At last he came to the subject which seemed to be most on his mind, and in a sad wistful way he asked me quietly what I had heard or knew about the movements of his divorced wife. (I believe the good fellow pays her a regular allowance.) I told him what I knew, and he went on—

“Do you know I could not help thinking of her when we were arguing there just now, and I’ll tell you a curious story bearing directly upon the subject we were discussing which, of course, I could not tell to these fellows. I had been in London on parliamentary business for more than a fortnight. One evening I had arranged with two friends to go to the theatre together—the Savoy, ‘Pinafore,’ I think. After the play we supped somewhere in the Strand, and at supper we were joined by a fourth friend, a press leader-writer, who had been unable to get away in time for the play. After supper the press-

man suggested cards in his house in Mornington Crescent, Hampstead Road, behind Euston Station. I — a plain provincial — rather demurred to setting out at midnight to drive half-way across London, but the others were all eager to go, and not to spoil the rubber I agreed to accompany them. We hansomed it out, and in half an hour after we had quitted the restaurant in the Strand the first deal of cards was round. We played for more than two hours, whist, not bridge, for bridge was not yet the vogue, with sixpenny points and a shilling on the rubber. In the last rubber we played I made a foolish blunder. Nobody noticed it, but the result was a treble, and the rubber against my partner and me. We turned out at three o'clock, my friends assuring me that we would soon find a hansom. They were right, for we had not gone a hundred yards when one overtook us. My two companions were going together in the same direction, westwards, and I insisted that they should take the hansom. I should certainly find one on the Euston Road. We said good - night, they whirled away, and I walked on. I had formed a desperate resolution. I would walk every inch of the way to my bedroom in the Grand

Hotel. In my young days, when I was very poor, I had formed a habit of mortifying myself. Whenever I had thrown away money by foolishness or mistake, I deliberately denied myself something—you would hardly think it, but sometimes even food—to make up for the loss. I found this practice an excellent consoler. Well, this habit had stuck to me, and I followed it now. By that unlucky mistake at cards I had perhaps thrown away half-a-crown. I could not well offer a cabby less to drive me to Charing Cross, so by walking all the way I should atone for the blunder.

“I was too tired to enjoy the walk, but a prowl round London between two and four in the morning well repays the trouble. The streets are never quite deserted—the yesterday meets the morrow, the late prowlers of the night encounter the early birds of the morning. At all hours, too, there are people—decent-looking people—standing here and there at the doors and the street corners quietly conversing as though they never went to bed. In the great arterial streets again one encounters an endless train of trundling waggons rolling marketwards, the arrest of which for a single night would bring famine to millions on the morrow.

"But I hurried on regardless, in no mood to study social or commercial problems. I had crossed Euston Road, and was proceeding down Tottenham Court Road, on the west side of the pavement, when on crossing the end of a side street—Goodge Street, you won't know it—I observed a man who had apparently been crouching in the shadow of a doorway on the south side of Goodge Street sally forth and come rapidly towards me. He came so straight for me that I had no doubt he meant mischief, and being, as you know, not the sort of fellow who waits for the first blow, I raised my stick and would certainly have hit the man full on the temples, but he started back.

"‘Stop, I have had enough of that to-night, Frank.’

"It was my cousin and old schoolfellow, Tom S.

"‘Good gracious, Tom! you here! but what’s up. You’ve had enough of what?’

"‘Oh, the confounded brute kicked me on the head; don’t you see my ear is swollen?’

"‘Dear me, Tom, so it is; you must be suffering dreadfully.’

"‘No, I’m not suffering at all, so don’t mind me just now. I’ve been waiting here for you. I want to tell you something that concerns

yourself very particularly, Frank. Go home to L. at once. There's something far wrong, I fear, there. I cannot say more, but go home at once; you may not even yet be too late.'

"He looked me straight in the face, and spoke with extraordinary earnestness and feeling. I saw tears in his kind eyes.

"'Good heavens, Tom! explain yourself—what's wrong?'

"'No, Frank, not a word more from me. Go home. Go home. Farewell,' and he turned and left me.

"'Stop,' I cried, but he paid no heed, and I darted across Tottenham Court Road after him. I followed in hot pursuit along the East pavement back towards Euston Road. Now when we were at Merchiston School together I broke the record for the quarter-mile, and Tom was always a mere duffer at games. But he seemed to have improved wonderfully, for I could not catch him. He actually drew away from me.

"'Never mind,' I muttered, 'he can't stay. Bother the fellow, I'll teach him a thing or two in running.'

"At the corner of Francis Street, Tom, being now thirty yards ahead of me, turned to the right, and when I reached the corner I could

not see him. I met a policeman coming along Francis Street, and I asked him if he had seen any one running. He replied in the negative, and inquired if I had been robbed. I said that I had not, and muttered something about trying to overtake a friend. The man held his lantern to my face and looked at me hard, and such unpleasant visions of the cells, or possibly of Colney Hatch, rose before me that I was glad when he moved on and left me free to resume my tramp to Charing Cross.

“This adventure perplexed and disquieted me very much. My cousin Tom had always been a little erratic and different from other people. He never mixed much with men; he had no calling, but lived quietly at home with his mother, who had considerable means and a small property in Forfarshire. His chief interest was farming, and he had some good pedigree stock, both black cattle and Clydesdales. By his acquaintances he was deemed a little odd, but with the few who knew him well he was most popular, for he was the best-hearted fellow in the world and never spoke ill of anybody. But how did he come to meet me and give me that mysterious warning in Goodge Street, Tottenham Court Road? He said he had been waiting for me,

and he seemed to have recognised me a long way off. But I was not aware that he knew that I was in London. Granted I was in London, it was a thousand to one against my being out walking at 3.30 in the morning, and a million to one against my crossing Goodge Street, Tottenham Court Road, at that hour. 'Waiting for me.' Why, one might as well spend the night in Conduit Street waiting for the Shah! And the injunction to go home. What was to be made of that? My wife was, as I thought, the most careful and anxious person in the world, and I had received a letter from her only a few hours before, written in the best of spirits. Surely she would have let me know if anything had been wrong. Then Tom's eccentric address, the swollen ear, and his sudden disappearance, all combined to make me think that the poor fellow was off his head, or had very much forgotten himself in his cups (though he didn't run like that), and so I attached less importance than I might otherwise have done to his mysterious warning. In any case, I had plenty of time to wire and receive a reply before the last morning express left for Scotland, so I made up my mind not to act at once upon Tom's strange advice.

"I had a few hours' sleep, and at eight I

rose and despatched the following wire to my wife—

“‘Sorry still detained; can come down for a day if anything wrong.’

“In less than an hour I had a reply—

“‘All well and flourishing; no need to hurry.’

“This entirely reassured me, and yet I did not quite like my wife’s telegram. I had not the faintest suspicion of anything wrong on her part, but that ‘no need to hurry’ hurt me a little. It was not just like the dear girl who used to be so impatient to have me home. I consoled myself, however, by thinking that it was kindly meant, and was intended to put me at my ease. I wrote a guarded letter to my cousin Helen, Tom’s sister, saying that I believed Tom was in London, and I would be glad to have his address, but as I might go home any day she had better write me under cover to my wife.

“I stayed in London two days longer, and then went home, travelling by the morning train. I got away at the last sooner than I had expected, and my wife was not looking for me till the following morning. I meant to give her a surprise. On my arrival I found her at dinner with Dr N., whom she intro-

duced as a very old friend. I was somewhat surprised, for I had never heard her even mention Dr N.'s name, and it was not just like my wife, usually so self-contained and circumspect, to entertain even an old friend to dinner in my absence. I had pictured her dining quietly with the children at one, and had bargained for nothing better than high tea for myself. However, I thought no evil, and I joined them at the table. By-and-by, in the course of conversation, my wife asked me what I meant by frightening her by a telegram at eight o'clock in the morning; it was so unlike me worrying. 'Ah,' I replied, 'thereby hangs a tale. I heard a strange story of your doings from Tom.'

"I glanced at my wife, and to my surprise, at the mention of Tom's name, she changed colour, becoming purple for a minute and then turning pale. I was shocked, for I supposed that she fancied that I resented Dr N.'s presence, and meant to show offensively that I did so. Dr N. had dropped his napkin, and was stooping to pick it up.

"'What do you mean, Frank?'" began my wife when she had recovered a little, and she spoke in a hyenaish tone I had never heard from her lips before.

“ ‘Had you a letter from Tom?’

“ ‘Bless me, dear, no; I am only joking. I met Tom in London.’

“ ‘It was my wife’s turn to be surprised now.

“ ‘In London—when?’

“ ‘Two days ago.’

“ ‘That’s quite impossible. Tom was here on Tuesday, and he has been at home ever since. He is very ill; a horse kicked him.’

“ ‘He may be ill, but he was in London on Tuesday night.’

“ ‘Nonsense. I had a letter from Helen this very morning. I’ll just get it,’ and she rose and left the room.

“ ‘She was back in a moment with a letter in her hand, and I read as follows:—

Thursday.

MY DEAR FRANK,—I have your letter. Poor Tom is not in London, but in bed here very ill. He was much disappointed at not finding you at home on Tuesday, and when he came back he unexpectedly announced his intention of going up to London the following morning. But in the middle of the night he was called out to see one of the mares which was ill, and whilst doctoring it he got a dreadful kick on the side of the head. He was carried in

insensible, and he has not spoken since. The doctors still hold out hopes. Mother bears up wonderfully, but we are in sore distress.—Your affectionate cousin,

HELEN S.

“I made up my mind to go to Forfarshire next day to see how matters stood, and to offer my help to my aunt. I started early, and on the way to the station I called at the post office for letters. There was a black-edged envelope among them. I tore it open and read—

SIR,—The favour of your company is requested to attend the funeral of my son, Thomas S., who died here this forenoon at half-past eleven o'clock, to the place of interment in M. Churchyard, on Thursday next, at one o'clock.—I am, your obedient servant,

MILRED S.

“Well, of course, you know the rest of my sad story. But to my grave I shall carry the bitter reproach that I did not obey Tom’s summons home. Even then I might have been in time to save the mother of my children. My God, I love her yet!”

THE WRITING ON THE WALL.

I.

THE bell for morning prayers at Miss Oliver's always rang twice. It is an unusual arrangement, but it was Miss Oliver's. She kept a school at St Andrews for girls, and her prayer bell rang every morning at 7.55 and again at 8 o'clock. On the sound of the first bell the pupils were expected to descend to the dining-room, where Miss Oliver greeted them as they entered. The second bell summoned the servants to prayers. It was forbidden to any girl to be in the dining-room before the first bell sounded, for Miss Oliver did not like to be disturbed when busied with her domestic duties, but woe to the girl who was not in her place when the 8 o'clock bell gave tongue.

It was a bright morning in March, and the

girls came trooping into the room in response to the first bell. Miss Oliver counted them as they came, and an expression of relief passed over her countenance as Annie Bernard entered; for Annie had actually twice been late within the past fortnight. Sixteen girls had entered the room, but still one was missing, and Miss Oliver looked round with a glance of puzzled surprise, for the defaulter was Mary Sinclair, the model girl of the school and Miss Oliver's special treasure. There was still a minute to run, but it ran without Mary Sinclair, and Miss Oliver moved majestically to her place at the table just as the second bell sounded forth its peremptory summons. The domestics must have been already marshalled behind the door, so prompt was their response, and in half a minute more all were seated. Miss Oliver opened the book with a troubled air; and then an event happened which was quite without precedent in the establishment. Miss Oliver had never been known, in the recollection of the oldest inmate, to interrupt her conduct of the morning devotions by any mundane remark. Even on that memorable morning when the coffee-pot exploded in the middle of the fourth chapter of Nehemiah, she continued to read with calm imperturbability.

There was a tradition, too, in the household that, when one summer's morning Charlie White, the doctor's son, cleared the room of pupils and maids by dropping a live rat through the open window, Miss Oliver and the rat left alone in the room concluded the family worship with all the usual decorum.

But on this occasion the overwhelming catastrophe implied in a possible delinquency on the part of Mary Sinclair overcame even Miss Oliver, and before she began to read she inquired of the housemaid—

“Jane, did you call Miss Sinclair?”

“Yes'm.”

“She is not ill?”

“No'm; I didn't notice anything partikler.”

“Very well.”

Prayers then proceeded in the usual manner. Nobody expected the defaulter until they were over, for any girl who happened by any chance to be late knew that there could be no more heinous aggravation of the offence than to enter the dining-room during the course of prayers. In ten minutes the devotions were over, the domestics filed out of the room, and every one there looked to the door to see Mary Sinclair enter, shamefaced and crest-fallen. But no Mary Sinclair appeared.

“Shall I run and see what has become of Mary?” asked Ellen Stirling.

Ellen was the baby of the school, and had a blunt matter-of-fact sort of manner which seemed to go down strangely with Miss Oliver, so that Ellen was the accepted spokeswoman of the party. But on this occasion Miss Oliver was too seriously disturbed to accept any suggestion, even from Ellen, and she replied with asperity—

“Wait until you are spoken to, child; I can attend to those matters myself.”

So saying she marched out of the room.

“Well, I never!” exclaimed Annie Bernard, when she was gone. “Won’t Miss Perfect catch it this time.”

“Don’t call names,” said little Ellen tartly. “Perhaps Mary is ill.”

“Ill! not likely; but I daresay she’ll sham now that she is caught sleeping in.”

A chorus of disapproval greeted the remark, for Mary, though a favourite of the Mistress, was popular with her schoolfellows.

Meanwhile Miss Oliver had ascended to Mary Sinclair’s room, where she found her pupil still in bed.

“Mary!”

There was no reply.

"Mary, do you hear me?"

Still no reply, though the regular breathing of the sleeper showed that nothing was wrong.

"Mary, what does this mean?" exclaimed Miss Oliver, as she laid her hands on her pupil's shoulder and shook her violently. The girl was roused at last; she half opened her eyes and murmured—

"Is that you, Jane? it seems very early."

"No, Mary, it is I; wake up this instant."

"Oh, it's you, Miss Oliver," said Mary, rubbing her eyes. "Is something wrong?"

"Yes, Mary, something is very far wrong indeed. Do you know what time it is? Do you know that prayers are over?"

"Oh, Miss Oliver, Miss Oliver!" exclaimed the girl, starting up, and the tears springing into her eyes, "don't tell me that. How could that have happened? Jane never called me."

"But Jane did call you as usual. See, there is your hot water. I never, never expected this of you, Mary."

"She never wakened me, I'm sure. Oh, Miss Oliver, you don't think I would be late if I had heard her?"

"No more at present, Mary, no more. I shall speak to Jane. But get up at once now;

Jane will bring you some bread and milk, and you will join us in the schoolroom *after breakfast.*"

Miss Oliver turned to go, but as she moved towards the door the skirt of Mary's dress hanging on the back of the door caught her observant eyes.

"Bless me, Mary, where were you yesterday?"

"Yesterday! I wasn't out yesterday; it was wet, you know."

"Just look at that skirt then, Mary, just look at that skirt. Do you mean to tell me you have gone for two days with your skirt covered with mud in that way? Mary, I am terribly disappointed, wofully disappointed. I had certainly hoped better things of you," said Miss Oliver, as she sailed out of the room.

Miss Oliver inquired of Jane as to whether she had called Miss Sinclair in the usual way. Jane was positive she had done so, and that Miss Sinclair had replied; though, now she thought of it, Miss Sinclair did seem unusually sleepy this morning. Miss Oliver directed the girl to go and get Miss Sinclair's skirt, and brush it before her pupil put it on.

Breakfast was over, and the girls had withdrawn to the schoolroom. Miss Oliver paused

for a moment in the lobby to give some household directions to Jane.

"I can't understand, Jane, neither you, nor I, nor any of the young ladies noticing Miss Sinclair's dress yesterday. Have you brushed it?"

"No'm, it won't brush; and Miss Sinclair has put on her brown dress."

"Won't brush—what do you mean, Jane?"

"Well'm, the skirt is splashing wet, and the mud is quite soft, and won't brush off."

"Jane, this is most extraordinary—bring me the skirt."

The skirt was brought for Miss Oliver's inspection. She found the lower part wringing wet, and bespattered with soft and apparently fresh mud. She was still examining it, when there was a rattle in the letter-box, as of a letter dropped in by somebody who did not ring.

"What is that, Jane?"

Jane went to the door, and returned with an envelope in her hand addressed "Miss Oliver," and with the word "private" at the corner of the envelope. Miss Oliver opened the envelope, which contained only a half-sheet of paper. There was neither signature, date, nor place, but simply these words, written in

a bold masculine hand: "I hate tale-bearing; but when a young lady is seen going home with the milk, it is time the mistress of the house should know."

Miss Oliver read the letter twice, and then folded it and put it in her pocket without remark.

"That will do, Jane. Stay—were all the young ladies' boots brushed last night?"

"No, mum, the night before; none of the young ladies were out yesterday."

"But they were all brushed the night before?"

"Yes, mum; of course—just as usual."

"Very well. You may go now."

The girls had waited nearly half an hour in the schoolroom for Miss Oliver, but she did not appear. Then Ellen Stirling volunteered to go and see what was keeping her. She found her sitting in Mary Sinclair's room, her head buried in her hands, and a pair of wet, mud-bespattered boots on the carpet before her.

II.

Binks was a lawyer and an alienist. Some ignorant people imagine that the latter is a

peculiarly aggravated form of foreigner, but no reader hereof need be told that this is a mistake, and that an alienist is no other than a scientific student of the different forms and phases of insanity. Amongst other modes of study, Binks was in the way, when he got a chance, of securing an introduction to an asylum doctor, and visiting an establishment to observe the peculiarities of the different cases. In this way it happened that one day he was on a visit to the — Lunatic Asylum. Dr Murray, the asylum doctor, had shown him several interesting cases indoors, and they were walking in the garden, when Binks observed in front of him a man busy weeding a border.

“Now,” said Dr Murray, “I see you know a good deal about this sort of thing, but here is a case that will puzzle you. Find out this poor fellow’s delusion, and I shall be surprised indeed.”

“Well, John,” said the doctor, pulling up beside the patient, “there’s a fine day.”

“Yes, doctor, the rain has kept off wonderfully.”

“This is my friend Mr Binks, who is just taking a look round the place. Mr Cooper — Mr Binks.”

The men's eyes met as they greeted each other, and instantly each recognised the other as an old schoolfellow.

"Bless me, Binks, you here!"

"Hulloa, Cooper, old fellow, what an age it is since I saw you!"

The old friends had much to talk over, and the doctor strolled away round the garden to see what some of the other patients were about.

"It's a treat to meet an old schoolfellow, more especially as there's nobody worth talking to except the doctor in this hole," said Cooper; "let's have a seat here, and smoke a pipe," and he moved towards a bench on the grass walk. The conversation was a curious one. Cooper plied Binks with old reminiscences and inquiries after former companions. Binks assailed Cooper with allusions and questions bearing upon the ordinary delusions of the insane. The result was satisfactory to neither party. Binks was perplexed by the complete rationality of Cooper, and his failure to rise to any of the craftily prepared baits which were laid for him. Cooper, on the other hand, was mortified at Binks' apparent indifference to old associations, and more and more confounded by the utter

irrelevancy of his replies, until at last it began to dawn upon him that the doctor's statement about Binks being there to see round the place was only a polite *façon de parler*, and that Binks had really been received as an inmate of the institution. By-and-by the doctor returned to take Binks away.

"Well, this beats me," whispered the lawyer to the doctor as he rose from the seat. "The man is as sane as you or I."

"Oh no, no, or he wouldn't be here;" and turning to Cooper, who was picking up his basket, "Well, John, it must be a pleasure to see a kent face."

"Yes, it's a rare treat indeed here, doctor," replied Cooper; and then he added in an undertone to the doctor alone, "but after all the pleasure is a very mixed one. Poor fellow, to me that remember him, it's lamentable to see him thus. He's as mad as a hatter, and evidently full of all sorts of delusions; but I gave him no encouragement to open out upon them."

Binks, observing that Cooper seemed to wish to say something privately to the doctor, had moved off a step or two, when a cat, which had been gambolling upon the grass,

came skipping up and rubbed itself in a friendly way against his legs.

"Well, pussy, you're a very kindly beast," muttered Binks, and he was playfully drawing his stick up the tabby's back, when suddenly he felt his arm grasped as in a vice, and turning round he saw Cooper, his face blazing with excitement and a wild terrified look in his eye.

"For God's sake, Binks, don't do that! For God's sake, don't stroke that cat's hairs the wrong way!"

"Bless me!" exclaimed Binks, "I didn't mean to hurt the beast—I was only playing with it."

"Hurt the beast! — the beast," screamed Cooper, and he made a lunge with his foot at the cat, which bolted away amongst the bushes. "You may play with a beast, but, by —, sir, you shan't play with me," and he looked so dangerous that Binks sidled towards a hoe which was lying upon the verge.

But the doctor's hand was on Cooper's arm, and the sound of his voice instantly soothed the poor maniac.

"Come, come, John, this will never do. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Of course Mr Binks does not understand your

case, or he would never have done such a thing. Come now, apologise and explain it all to him."

Cooper's indignation had entirely subsided and given place to an expression of profound dejection before the doctor had finished speaking, and, with tears in his eyes, he began—

"Oh, forgive me, Binks; but I was so terrified I did not know what I was saying."

"Oh, it's all right," replied Binks, whose curiosity was reviving with his subsiding anxiety; "but I really did not see anything so far wrong in titivating a cat's back."

"No, no, not for you, but for me a thousandfold."

"Dear, dear, and how does it affect you?"

"Affect me?" replied Cooper, with a gleam of returning excitement in his eye. "Magnetism, electricity, mesmerism: a threefold cord which no man can break!"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Binks, glancing significantly at Dr Murray.

"Well, well," said the doctor, who feared a renewed paroxysm, "we had better say no more about it in the meantime. I see it would be too much for you, John; but I'll explain it all to Mr Binks."

Binks bade Cooper a friendly good-bye.

“I thought it as well to keep up the form of the thing and say good-bye,” said Cooper to the doctor, the moment Binks’ back was turned. “I hope I shall see a good deal of him whilst he’s here : though I suppose he will be a paying patient.”

III.

John Cooper was the most brilliant school-boy and student of his time at St Andrews. The son of a peasant woman, who died young, and of a dissipated father, who married again and went to the colonies, he had been reared by his maternal grandmother, a thrifty, hard-working old washerwoman, who had a cottage and a small croft, on which she kept a cow, at Strathkinnes, a village in the east of Fife, some three miles from St Andrews. Mrs M’Ara had little more than was enough to keep herself and her grandson in clothes and food. But secondary education was cheap at St Andrews, and John was able to walk into that town every day for his classes. In this way he obtained a good school education ; and on leaving school he gained a bursary, which enabled him to continue his

studies at St Andrews University. But a Scottish university course gives far too long an interval of leisure in the summer; and in the summer young Cooper used to try to do something for himself and his grandmother, who was getting rather past much active work, by private tuition. This he readily obtained at St Andrews; but, after his third session, the reputation he had made by the almost unprecedented feat of taking the first place in moral philosophy, and in the Senior Humanity, Greek, and mathematical classes, was such that he received a very tempting offer from a wealthy Glasgow merchant to spend some months in his house, as private tutor to one of his sons who had been at a badly conducted school, and who needed close coaching to enable him to enter an English university in the autumn. This was the first time that Cooper had been separated for more than a day or two from his grandmother; and, naturally, the old woman missed the boy much, and fretted a good deal at her loneliness. But the summer would have slipped away, and the loneliness would have been forgotten when classes were resumed in the winter, but for the overwhelming catastrophe which overtook young Cooper

in the course of this employment. The story of this misfortune, as Dr Murray narrated it to Binks, was as follows.

Bradley, an Oxford undergraduate, happened to be visiting at the mansion near Dollar, which Cooper's employer, Mr Russel, had taken for summer quarters; and one evening after dinner the conversation turned upon the subject of mesmerism and telepathy. The undergraduate dabbled in the art, and made some vaunt of his powers, when he was at once smartly taken up by Purves, a sceptical young doctor, who happened to be of the party, and who ridiculed the pretensions of the Oxonian. The latter, who was a member of the psychical circle at his University, and steeped in mysticism and hypernaturalism, resented somewhat warmly the sneers of the doctor, and volunteered to submit his powers to the test.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll hypnotise you. Then I'll give you something, and tell you to go out and hide it wherever you please. I'll waken you up when you come back, and you will not be able to tell where the article is hid. Then I will hypnotise you again, and I'll go and find the thing myself, you accompanying me all the way."

"Bosh!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Well, try."

The doctor declined, but suggested that the tutor, who sided strongly with him in the argument, might lend himself to the experiment. Cooper, who was full of scientific enthusiasm, consented with alacrity, and in five minutes he was hypnotised.

"Well, what will you hide?" asked Bradley, when the trance was fully induced. Cooper looked round and pointed to a ring upon the hand of Mary, a girl of fifteen, who was a niece of Mr Russel, and on a visit in the house.

"Very well. Mary, you don't object?"

The girl hesitated. "But you are sure, Mr Bradley, the ring won't be lost?"

"Perfectly sure of that, I'll go bail for it," replied Bradley; and the girl yielding, though still with some reluctance, handed Bradley the ring, which he placed in Cooper's hands.

"Now, go and hide that ring somewhere, don't speak to anybody, but come back here at once when you have done it."

Cooper departed with alacrity, and the party awaited his return with some excitement. It was long ere he came back, and as minute after minute slipped away the tension of feeling increased. Mary was visibly uneasy about her

ring; the doctor almost insolently cynical; Bradley alone seemed perfectly imperturbed, and awaited the return of Cooper with every appearance of confident assurance.

At last, after about half an hour, he came. They watched him from the window as he strode rapidly across the gravel, and saw in a moment that he was still in the trance. Every one held his breath as the sleeper stepped into the drawing-room.

"Well, is it safely hidden?" inquired Bradley.

Cooper nodded assent.

"You are quite sure you know where it is?"

Again Cooper nodded.

"Very well, then," said Bradley, "to proceed with the experiment"—and he blew in Cooper's eyes, and made the negative passes. In a moment Cooper was looking round the room, quite himself again, but evidently in much amazement.

"Well, did you hide the ring?" inquired Bradley again.

"Hide the ring? No; what ring?"

"Why, Miss Mary's ring to be sure. You told us just now you had hidden it."

"Me! I never said such a thing. But what have I been doing; did I really hide something? I wasn't out of the room was I?"

“Are you satisfied so far?” inquired Bradley, coolly turning to the doctor. The latter grunted a surly assent.

“Well, to continue the experiment”—

But the party had reckoned without their host, for a heavy step was heard in the hall, and one of the boys exclaimed, “Hulloa, here’s the governor!”

The door opened, and in stepped Mr Russel, evidently very much put about, and panting after an unusually rapid ascent of the hill up to the house.

“Hi, hi—is Mr Cooper here? Why, sir, what is all this nonsense?”

It appeared that whilst enjoying his evening cigar down near the river, the worthy gentleman had observed Cooper skulking along in a mysterious way, and had accosted him; but the tutor made no answer, did not indeed even look round, and slunk away rapidly into deeper cover. Of course an explanation of what was going on had to be given to Mr Russel, and this was fatal to the completion of the experiment. Highly indignant that anything so extravagant and uncanny should have been set about on his premises, he absolutely prohibited any renewal of the *séance*.

“If there is nothing in it,” said he, “it’s

silly ; and if there's anything in it, it's sinful : and in either case it shan't go on in my house."

"Very good," remarked Bradley, "I shall respect your wishes ; but I am bound to tell you frankly, unless the experiment be renewed, the ring cannot be recovered."

"Oh, but it must be recovered, uncle, it was poor Jeannie's ring," exclaimed Mary, the tears starting to her eyes, for the ring was a memento of an elder sister whose death was still an open sorrow. But Mr Russel would not relent, and so the matter stood over the night, though Bradley plainly told him that the lapse of any considerable interval, even perhaps a single night, might render it impossible for him to re-awaken the recollection of the hiding of the ring. Mr Russel was the less disposed to be moved by such a consideration, as he regarded the whole affair as a silly piece of tomfoolery, and he was naturally indignant that Cooper should have carried the matter so far as not to respond when he accosted him. He expected, accordingly, that the ring would be quietly restored in the morning, and no more was said about the matter that night. It was therefore with considerable annoyance that next forenoon Mr Russel was disturbed at his letters by the entrance of Mary, with a tearful

appeal about the lost ring. He listened to her story, and at once sent for Cooper and Bradley, and told them that the ring must be restored without further nonsense. "If that be not done, Mr Cooper, within half an hour your engagement here ceases; and," he added with significance, "I shall then look to another authority to recover the ring."

It was in vain that Cooper protested, and Bradley tried to reason the matter. Mr Russel was inexorable, and Cooper would have been dismissed upon the spot but for the friendly intervention of Dr Purves, who came to the study on hearing of the dispute. He assured Mr Russel that, though he himself did not believe that Bradley possessed all the powers he professed, or that the ring could be recovered by the renewal of the trance, the existence of such trances had been scientifically verified, Cooper had undoubtedly been in a trance when he got the ring, and it was scientifically probable that on awakening he could not remember what he had done whilst in the state of trance.

Mr Russel was so far moved by these representations that he felt that he could not make a serious affair of the abstraction of the ring, and the matter was allowed to stand over

again. But the ring did not reappear, and the whole incident was so distasteful to Mr Russel that he determined to terminate Cooper's engagement; and accordingly one morning, a week after the loss of the ring, Cooper found himself dismissed, with his full salary to the term of his engagement, and the assurance that there was no imputation against him. He returned to Strathkinnes and resumed his studies, and November found him again at the University. But from the day of his return home his friends marked a change in him. He was not his old self. At first he complained of headaches. Then depression, which gradually became more intense, settled upon him. He became querulous and irritable, seemed to lose all faculty for application, and stood nowhere in his class examinations. A doctor was consulted, who prescribed for dyspepsia; but that did no good. The poor lad gradually got worse, he ceased to attend his classes, delusions settled on his mind; and April, which should have seen him a graduate of the University, found him an inmate of an asylum. As the case developed, it gradually became evident that what preyed upon the patient's mind was the ring incident. He was oppressed with a notion that he was blamed for

stealing it ; he was in constant dread of apprehension ; he knew half a dozen people had seen him get the ring, and that he had failed to restore it. He believed, therefore, that he had no defence which would hold in a court of justice. Coupled with this morbid delusion there was a constant sense that he was still to a certain extent under the mesmeric influence, and with strange perversity, in view of the history of the incident, he believed that it was this influence which hindered the recovery of the ring. An examination of the lad's papers threw further light upon the case. It was obvious from the mass of amatory verses amongst them that he had conceived a passionate affection for the owner of the ring, and the medical men had no difficulty in associating this amongst the causes which had upset his mental balance. There was fortunately nothing in the facts to suggest that he had ever intruded his sentiments upon their object, or that the girl had ever bestowed upon him a thought of other than good-natured indifference. Under asylum treatment Cooper gradually threw off his melancholia, and recovered his intellectual tastes and interests ; but the delusions about the ring and mesmerism remained as strong as ever. Of magnetism and electricity, which he

associated with the hateful mesmeric influence, he had a profound horror. Poor Mrs M'Ara did not long survive the terrible blow sustained in the worse than death of her grandson, and soon sank in sorrow and desolation to the grave.

"But now tell me, doctor," began Binks when Dr Murray had concluded his recital.

"I know what you are going to ask," interrupted the doctor. "Everybody asks, after hearing of a case of this kind, whether a patient so eminently rational on all other matters cannot be quietly reasoned out of his delusion?"

"Pardon me," replied Binks, "but I am hardly such a novice in these studies as to ask that. My question is this: Suppose the ring were actually found, and Cooper were satisfied of the fact, would that, in your opinion—I do not say restore him at once—but would it give him a prospect of recovery?"

Dr Murray hesitated for a moment, and then replied with great deliberation, "I think not. Speaking as an expert in the matter, I should say that, from experience of such cases, the probabilities are all against such a discovery now making any difference other than perhaps a change in the precise form or expression of

the delusion ; but," he added, " I cannot say, I have no scientific warrant for saying that such an occurrence might not have a beneficial effect, or even lead to a permanent cure."

" There is another question I should like to put," continued Binks. " Has hypnotism never again been tried ? Might not Bradley, or, failing him, some other mesmerist, be got, as a desperate experiment, to reinduce the trance, in the hope that it might reawaken a lost train of memory, and enable Cooper to find the ring ?"

" No," replied the doctor ; " I confess the idea has more than once occurred to me, but in the present state of scientific opinion upon these matters, I dare not attempt such an experiment, even if I myself believed it would prove successful. But I do not believe it would. I believe that the possibility of recollection is irretrievably lost, and that any such experiment might occasion a mental cataclysm which would entirely destroy what is left of the poor fellow's mind."

IV.

A few days after his visit to the asylum, Binks received a letter from Cooper, in which

the latter apologised with much contrition for the scene he had occasioned, and confessed with frankness, and further apologies, the mistake he had made as to the explanation of Binks' presence at the asylum. The letter then proceeded: "And now, Binks, I appeal to you as almost my only friend who is left. Dr Murray has, I believe, told you my sad story. I believe the ring may yet be found. I constantly think I see my old granny at night. I don't know whether I am waking or dreaming; but she looks at me so earnestly, and always says, 'Look in the cupboard.' Now, Binks, I am more and more persuaded that the ring is to be found in the cupboard between the fireplace and the window in the old cottage at Strathkinnes. Of course, if it is found there, it won't clear me—in fact it will conclusively condemn me; but still, at all costs, I desire to make full restitution to the poor girl I have so cruelly injured. Now will you, as a friend and brother, go to Strathkinnes, carefully search the cupboard, and let me know the result?"

The letter had, of course, been opened by Dr Murray, who added a postscript: "Write the poor fellow a soothing letter, but, of course, say nothing to encourage this absurd nonsense

about the cupboard. I fear this is some new delusion developing itself."

Binks complied with Dr Murray's instructions. He wrote Cooper a kindly letter, accepting the apology, but advising him to consult Dr Murray about the cupboard, as being the person most conversant with the whole matter, and most likely to lead inquiries to a satisfactory issue.

"But," said Binks to himself, as he dropped the letter into the pillar, "Dr Murray or no! I confess I have a hankering after a rummage through that cupboard."

v.

A few months later Binks took advantage of the February recess of the Court to visit St Andrews, where he looked for a day or two's golfing. But the Fates were against him, for on the very evening of his arrival in the ancient city a heavy fall of snow set in, and next morning the Links were unplayable even with red balls. Binks spent the forenoon loitering about the Club and gossiping in Tom Morris's shop. But in the afternoon, resisting an invitation to make one in a whist party, he

determined to gratify his long-cherished wish to visit Strathkinnes; and accordingly he set out past Rathelpie for that village. A walk of an hour, past Mount Melville and across Magus Moor, brought him to Strathkinnes, a long row of red-tiled cottages, scattered and scrambling up the slope of a well-cultivated hill. Binks had a vague recollection that his old schoolfellow had lived near the far end of the village, but he did not know the house. Accordingly he entered a small shop, "licensed to retail teas, tobaccos, and ale," and made inquiries about the house formerly occupied by the Widow M'Ara.

"Ye'll be goin' to tak' the hous' yersel'," said the obliging shopwoman.

"Indeed, is the house to let, then?" asked Binks.

"Ay, and hes been this mony a day; but, eh dear me, it'll need a heap dune till't afore it's fut for a body tae live in."

It was with some difficulty that Binks got the good woman to restrain her garrulity, and it was not until he had broken the thread of her discourse by purchasing three pennyworth of sweets that he was able to induce her to come to the door of the shop and point out the house he was in quest of.

Mrs M'Ara's house was a two-roomed cottage, about fifty yards back from the road, with a garden, or what had once been a garden—now it was all covered with a very dirty turnip crop—in front. Nailed to the outer gate was a board with a now hardly legible inscription, “House and garden to let. Apply to D. Balsillie, joiner.”

A smooth line of snow up the centre of the garden-ground indicated what had once been the walk up to the house; and passing through the gate, which was not locked, but only tied with a rotten piece of cord, Binks approached the cottage. He found the door locked and the front windows shuttered up with outside shutters, so he went round to inspect the back of the house. There he found a small grass plot, with one or two rotten washing-poles, where the old washerwoman had been in use to dry the clothes. Against the cottage wall, at one end, was a dilapidated pigstye; at the other end there was a rusty boiler, sunk amidst ruined brickwork. There was no door at the back of the house, but there was one small window. Like the front windows, it was shuttered up; but, unlike the front windows, it was completely screened from view. Binks looked carefully about to see if anybody was

looking, but he saw nothing living in sight except a covey of partridges, looking very miserable among the snow. Then this distinguished jurist, who, two nights before, at a political meeting, had declaimed for half an hour about respect for the law as a necessary condition of civilisation, and denounced with indignant horror any proposal to make law-breakers law-makers, seized the shutter and tore it down. Several of the window-panes were cracked, but for a wonder none of them was broken, and the window was bolted down. Binks smashed a pane with his walking-stick, passed his hand in and unloosed the catch. Next, he tried to pull down the upper sash, but the window evidently opened only from below, and when he got the lower sash open he found that he had to hold it up, as, like all old windows, it was not hung. It is nature to climb through a narrow aperture head first, but, had Binks been prudent, he would have disregarded nature and gone through the window, which was small and narrow, feet first. But Binks was not prudent, so having climbed up on some bricks, for the window was four to five feet from the ground, he got his head through first, and proceeded to draw his shoulders and body through after it. It was

a gingery business, for there was only a narrow ledge on the inside on which to gather up his body as he got it through, and he had to keep up the sash all the time. All was going well, however, and Binks was just drawing his legs through, when a bat fluttered in his face. He let go the sash to brush it away, the sash fell, his other hand slipped from the sill, and in a moment Binks was hanging head downwards in the room, his feet caught by the sash and his nose bleeding. What a horrible death! At least so thought Binks, when he realised the situation. It was no use to shout, for nobody could hear him. It was no use to try to stanch the bleeding, for how could a bleeding of the nose be stanchd whilst hanging by the heels? It remained only to say his prayers, and as the dying lawyer raised his face, his eyes, growing accustomed to the gloom of the interior, detected shelves upon the wall right up to the window from which he hung. Without waiting to finish his devotions, Binks clambered hand-over-hand up to the level of the window, then, clinging to a shelf with one hand, he released his feet with the other, and in a moment he was standing upon the cottage floor, drying up the bleeding and muttering, "Well, upon my word!"

A glance round satisfied Binks that he was in "the room," or "ben the house." The floor was littered with dirt and rubbish, and in the apartment there was no furniture except a broken chair, which apparently nobody had thought it worth while to take away. The press, he recollected, according to Cooper, was between the fireplace and a window.

Yes, there to be sure it was, between the hearth and the small window by which he had entered. When he had stopped the bleeding and drawn himself together, Binks turned to the press. It was locked, but the key was in the lock, and he opened the door. The cupboard was about three feet square. There were two shelves at the top, and below them there were pegs for hanging clothes. It was with difficulty that Binks could make out this much in the uncertain light, but he had prudently brought a candle with him. Having lighted this, he next proceeded to search the press for the lost ring. He examined the two shelves carefully first, but found nothing there except two dead mice, a bit of rag, and a bone button. On the floor there was nothing but a thick coating of dust and a few rusty nails. Binks looked carefully for clefts or crannies. It was long ere he found one, but at last his

diligence was rewarded. At the back, midway between the two shelves, he discerned a small fissure in the plaster; it seemed the only thing of the kind in the whole press, and he eagerly leant across to explore it with his toothpick. The fissure was small and narrow, and one scoop with the toothpick robbed it of its coveted treasure—a black beetle! which fell sprawling upon the shelf beneath.

“Well, I’m blowed!” This was all that Binks said when his search was completed, for Binks was not a man of many words. But the circumstances were so aggravating that they might well have excused even a stronger expression of opinion. To have tramped four miles through the snow, torn down the window-shutter, clambered through the window, skinned his ankles, broken his nose, and rummaged through all the dirt and dust of that desolate press, and to be rewarded by a black beetle! It showed the folly of lending an ear to superstitions—the infinite folly of listening to the superstitious fancies of a maniac!

The best thing now to be done was to get out of the hovel as quickly as possible. This time Binks was more careful in his negotiation of the window. He propped up the broken chair against the wall, and drew himself care-

fully up. He would have gone feet first this time, but he had not room to turn his body on the narrow sill and no leverage to swing himself up. So he got his head and shoulders through first, and then he paused for a moment to draw breath. The day had improved wonderfully during the last half-hour. The evening sun had come out, lit up the western hills with fiery splendour, and tinged with a brilliant glow the ragged corners of the snow-clouds which had brooded over the landscape throughout the day. The partridges had plucked up courage, and were moving off to two stacks in the corner of the field ; a hare was scampering over a neighbouring plough towards a field of turnips ; and on a bush at the foot of the green a blackbird was busy making a supper of haws. The picture had an exhilarating effect upon Binks after the squalor of the interior, and he settled down upon his elbows to drink it all in.

“Hulloa ! do you live here ?”

Unobserved by Binks, whose eyes were on the sunlit Lomonds, a stranger, treading lightly on the soft snow, had rounded the corner of the house, and stood before him,—a short, wiry, sunburnt man, in a loose golfing jacket and knickerbockers. He was looking with the

cool nonchalance of a man whom nothing will take aback, at the figure at the window before him, and certainly it was well worth looking at. Binks was leaning forward upon his chest, his elbows planted upon the sill, the window-sash resting upon his back, his nose was much swollen, his face was smeared here with blood and there with dust and soot, for whilst rummaging the press he had been constantly feeling his face to make sure his nose had not begun bleeding again. The stranger, however, had met his match in coolness, for, without moving a muscle, Binks calmly replied—

“No; do you?”

“Hardly,” replied the stranger; “but I had a fancy to take a look round the place.”

“Well, as I was here first, you will perhaps allow me to do the honours. Won’t you come in?”

“Yes; if you will kindly open the door.”

Binks explained that it was not in his power to do so, and suggested that the stranger, who gave his name as Captain Hunter, should go along to Mr Balsillie’s for the key.

“But in that case,” continued Binks, “you will excuse my waiting, as I have no relish to meet a charge of housebreaking.”

“Blow Mr Balsillie!” replied the Captain;

"if you got in through the window, surely I can. Come, clear the course."

Binks, having advised the Captain to be careful, and warned him that the window was not hung, withdrew to allow the stranger to enter.

"Well, I don't care to put my head under a guillotine," said Captain Turner. "The wood's rotten; I'll pull the whole bally thing out," and in a moment he had wrenched the sash out of the window.

"Well," remarked Binks as the Captain dropped into the room, "if there's swinging for this, we'll swing together."

"It don't seem much of a place anyhow," remarked the Captain as he looked around. "Let me see; there's a door there, a shuttered-up window here, and a box-bed opposite the fireplace, and a cupboard—yes, a cupboard, apparently between the fireplace and the little window."

Binks watched the Captain closely, but said nothing; he was puzzled for his life to know what the man was after. The Captain stood for several minutes looking about and pulling his moustache in an uneasy way. Then he went to the cupboard. He examined it; not quite so carefully as Binks had done, but still

with curious minuteness, striking one or two vestas to assist him, for Binks did not offer him the candle.

“I suppose the other place is the kitchen; let’s have a look at it,” said the Captain at last.

The kitchen was of course in complete darkness, but the Captain struck another light, and now Binks offered him the candle.

“Oh, you’ve got a candle; you might have saved my vestas,” remarked the Captain half reproachfully.

The kitchen was as desolate as the room. There was some straw on the floor, either the remnants of a packing or the contents of an emptied mattress, and gathered together in a corner were one or two broken articles of crockery, and an old floor-brush worn to the wood. The grate had been removed, but since then there had apparently once been a fire lighted, probably on an occasion when the house was used as a committee-room at an election, for there were a number of torn-up voting-cards scattered about, and on the wall somebody had drawn, with a piece of burned wood, a head of Mr Gladstone, and scrawled beneath—

“That huge, great dragon, horrible in sight,
Bred in the loathsome lakes of Tartary.”

"The sentiment is admirable, but the place is dawky," remarked the Captain, when he had looked around. "I think I'll be off."

The two men returned to "the room," and the Captain was just about to blow out the light, when he hesitated for a moment, and then he again went to the cupboard. He made another pretty close inspection, but apparently without any satisfaction, for he shut the door again and prepared to mount the window.

"Shall I blow out the light?" he asked of Binks; "or do you intend to remain longer?"

"You will pardon me," said Binks, without noticing the question, "but I shall be much obliged if you will kindly tell me why you look so particularly in that cupboard."

"Yes, I will pardon you," replied Captain Hunter; "but at the same time I shall take leave to observe that that is my affair."

"Certainly," said Binks; "and as I see my curiosity has annoyed you, I regret my question."

"Oh, come now, I beg your pardon; I feel your curiosity is natural, and my reply was a rude one; but to tell the truth, now you have spoken, I myself have a curiosity to know what brings you here. Possibly the explanation of your somewhat mysterious visit might help to

clear up my mystery. Shall we exchange confidences ? ”

“ With all my heart ; and to show that my curiosity is well under control, I shall begin.”

Binks half leant back against the wall, half sat on the broken chair, the candle which he had taken from the other in his hand, and told Captain Hunter—who had lighted a cigarette, and standing with his hands in his pockets in front of Binks listened with close attention—the sad story of John Cooper.

“ Well, your story’s gruesome enough, but it don’t throw much light upon mine,” remarked the Captain, when Binks had concluded his narrative.

“ Which is ? ”

VI.

“ Well, do you know,” began the Captain, “ this cottage is connected with one of the most curious experiences in my life. It was in the year 1885 ; I had been ordered to join our second battalion, then stationed in India, and I had come to St Andrews to bid adieu to an old aunt, and put in a day or two’s work on the Links. It was the night of a ball in the town

hall. I left the place about half-past one, and walked down to Playfair Terrace, smoking, with my friend Ewing. He wanted me to come in, but as I had to leave next day, I was anxious to get home, so I said good-bye, and went up the narrow lane—Jacob's Ladder, you know; it was a fine clear night, after a very wet day—towards my aunt's house at Rathelpie. Ewing had given me a capital cigar when we parted, and it was not half done when I reached my aunt's door. I stood for a minute or two in the doorway to enjoy a few more whiffs, for the old lady detested smoking in the house. Whilst so engaged, I was surprised to observe a female figure pass along the road in front of me. I let her fifty yards or so ahead, and then I strolled after her, with no evil intent, I assure you, for she looked old and decrepit enough, but merely because my curiosity was excited to know what the old body could be after, prowling about at that time of the night. I followed her for about a hundred yards, and then she stopped. She was standing on the footway. There was a garden wall six or seven feet high at the place. Suddenly the woman made a spring of extraordinary agility. I saw her for a moment upon the top of the wall, and then she disappeared from view. Overcome by

curiosity I ran forward, clambered up upon the wall, and looked over to see what had become of the woman. At first I saw nothing, but raising my eyes, I beheld her walking like a cat upon the top of a wall that ran straight from the road to a couple of semi-detached houses at the head of a piece of garden-ground, separating apparently the respective portions of garden belonging to each house. The woman walked straight—at least, I mean, she walked on, for the wall being straight she was bound to go straight—till she came to the houses. There was a window in the first floor of the house nearest to where I was, just within reach of a person standing on the top of the wall. I saw the old woman clutch the sill with one hand, and shove up the lower sash with the other; then she drew herself up and disappeared from view. A moment afterwards I saw a light in the room. I need not say how completely puzzled I was by this adventure. My first idea was of course of theft; but the old woman seemed a most unlikely thief, and her movements were not those of a house-breaker—she seemed to move without hesitation or dread, as if she thoroughly knew the place. Still I felt it to be my duty to alarm the household, so I went round, meaning to ring

the front-door bell. I found, however, that it was a much longer detour than I had imagined to reach the front of the house, which was shut off from the back approaches by garden walls and other enclosed ground ; and when at last I got round, there were several semi-detached buildings all exactly alike ; and not being familiar with the place, I was quite at a loss to know which was the one I had seen the woman enter from the back. I began to be afraid she would be out and away again, so there was nothing for it but to hurry back again to the back road where I had seen her before. When I got back the light was still in the room, and I was just clambering over the wall to investigate matters more closely when I saw a figure at the window. The old woman emerged and swung herself down to the cross wall, and then I saw that she was not alone. There was another female figure at the window. The old woman stretched out her hands and almost lifted the other from the window on to the wall beside her. Then the pair moved rapidly together along the top of the wall in my direction. I slid down from my perch and stepped into the garden doorway. Then I saw the two females descend into the road beside me, the old woman again assisting her

companion, who I saw was a young girl in morning dress. The moment they were on the road, the pair moved off at a rapid rate in the direction of the country. I followed. On, on, on they went; it seemed to me an interminable journey. I thought we had walked ten miles, though we cannot have covered more than four. They passed up through this village. There was not a light or a sound in any dwelling in the place. They turned in at the garden-gate of this very cottage and entered the house together. Presently I saw a light in this room. I tried to see in through the front window, but the blind was drawn, and I could only make out that the pair were engaged at something about that very cupboard there. I tried the front door. It had only been drawn to, and it opened without noise. The door there, between the kitchen and the room, was open; I stole forward and peered into this room. The mysterious couple were still engaged about the cupboard, and apparently unconscious of my presence. I was dying to know what they were about, and stole round there by the bed to see past the corner of the cupboard door. But, alas! my foot trod upon a lucifer match: it went off with a loud crack. There was a movement in the press. I saw

the old woman turn and look at me. She stretched out one hand and beckoned me towards her. I hesitated ; she beckoned again, I clutched the door of the box-bed to check my impulse to advance. Then gradually the figure of the old woman grew misty. I felt my hold on the box relaxing. I saw nothing but two great grey eyes looking into my very soul and the bony hand still beckoning me to come.

“ There was a knocking at the door of my bedroom, and I heard my aunt’s voice : ‘ Tom, Tom, do you know it is half - past nine o’clock ? ’ ”

“ I started up, and found I had been lying across the top of my bed, still in my dress clothes, though without my topcoat and overshoes, which I afterwards found in their place in the hall. My trousers were very muddy, but otherwise there was nothing wrong ; and I am sorry to say it was no new experience to me to have fallen asleep before undressing after a winey night. I had no idea I had taken so much at the ball, and there was no whisky on the top of it, for I remembered quite clearly refusing Ewing’s hospitality. But I must, I thought, have had far more than was good for me. My mind was a blank as to how I got home. Indeed I remembered nothing after

coming up Jacob's Ladder, except that extraordinary dream about the old woman, for, of course, I thought it must have been a dream, though anything so vivid in that way I had never before experienced. Well, I left St Andrews that afternoon. I have never been back there until yesterday, though all these years the memory of that night has haunted me. To-day I had an irresistible longing to walk out the road here. Except on that night, if I was here then, I was never near the place before. Yet I find the village, the cottage, the kitchen, the room, the windows, the bed, the fireplace, the cupboard, exactly as I recall that night's adventure. Upon my word, this beats all! Well, that's my story."

VII.

"It's time we were clearing out of this," said Binks; "this candle won't last many minutes longer, and it must be quite dark outside."

"With all my heart, but——"

"But we had better take one more look in that cupboard."

"Exactly."

The search was as fruitless as the former ones, and they were just turning away, when Binks raised the candle for a final look round the cupboard.

“Hulloa, what’s this?” exclaimed Hunter.

“Where?”

“There, on the wall, just between these two pegs under the wood of the shelf.”

“Only somebody been scribbling something,” said Binks, with a tone of disappointment, as he looked closer to read some words faintly scratched, as if with a pin point, upon the plaster, but his heart almost stood still as he read them :

“RING UNDER STONE—V. B. B. C.”

VIII.

It was quite dark when the explorers scrambled again through the window, and they had a very wintry walk to St Andrews. Next morning they met by appointment at the Club, and proceeded up the narrow path called Jacob’s Ladder to explore the place near Rathelpie where Hunter had such strange experiences on that March night in 1885. The Captain had no difficulty in finding the

place where, as he said, the old woman mounted the wall.

"Well, she must have been an athletic old girl if she climbed up there," observed Binks. "Now let me see which is the window?"

"That one on the left there,—just within reach of the wall."

"Let us look, now," said Binks again; "you see that 'old wife' on the chimney? we can't mistake that. Let us go round and find who lives in the house."

Guided by the chimney-can, the two friends had no difficulty in identifying the house at the front side. There was a ticket over the door—"House to let, furnished or unfurnished. Apply to Mr M'Gregor, House Agent." They were looking about for some one to ask as to the occupancy of the house, when the door opened, and a gentleman and lady, escorted by a man with keys in his hands, issued from the door. The man showed the couple to the gate, and he was just turning back to the door when Hunter hailed him.

"I say, is this house to let?"

"Yes, sir. I have just been showing a lady and gentleman through it. Would you like to see the house?"

"Shall we?" asked Hunter.

"By all means," replied Binks.

As the man showed them through the public rooms he explained that the house had been a ladies' boarding-school, kept by a Miss Oliver, who had died a couple of months before. The furniture was all in its place, and little seemed to have been touched since the good lady's death. The room with the window to the back near the wall turned out to be a small bedroom, which the man understood had generally been occupied by one of the senior pupils. In a room near it, which had been Miss Oliver's own bedroom, there were a number of framed photograph groups hung round the wall.

"The pupils of each year, I see," observed Hunter.

"Where's '85?"

"Here it is," replied Hunter, pointing to a group under which were the words, "Sea View House, 1885."

"Now," said Binks, spotting a clue, "look carefully at this one, and see if you can recognise the girl you saw come out through the window."

"My dear fellow," replied Hunter, glancing at the photo, "it is utterly impossible. I can't say I saw the girl's face, and I would not recog-

nise her if she stood before me this moment. The old woman! I should know *her* if I met her in Hades!"

IX.

"MR BINKS,—Mrs Sinclair at home, Tuesday, 28th March—9.30 to 2. 25 Eglinton Crescent, 3rd March 189 . Dancing. *R.S.V.P.*"

This was very remarkable. Binks was not a dancing man, and he had never heard of Mrs Sinclair. There must be a mistake somewhere. Undoubtedly it must be meant for his brother Peter, the civil engineer, who went out constantly. But no! the envelope was against that; for by no possibility could "Theodosius Binks, Esq., Advocate," be made to read "Peter Binks, Esq., C.E." However, he would ask Peter about it. Perhaps Peter could explain,—at all events, he could tell who Mrs Sinclair was, for Peter knew about everybody. In this latter conjecture Binks was not mistaken. Peter could tell all about the Sinclairs; in fact, though he had not Mr Sinclair's acquaintance, he, as usual, knew a great deal more about that gentleman and his circumstances than Binks did about most of his own intimate friends. Mr Sinclair, it appeared,

was a Glasgow merchant, new to Edinburgh, but very wealthy, and "not at all a bad sort."

"But why should they invite me?" inquired Binks.

Peter did not know,—in fact, he was even more surprised than his brother that Theodosius should have been asked, and, to tell the truth, he did not much like it; for the Sinclair girls were dancing acquaintances of his own, and for the last week he had been angling, without success, for an invitation.

"Of course you won't go," remarked Peter superciliously.

Now, all Peter's persuasive powers would never have induced Binks even to consider his going to this or any other dance as within the bounds of practical possibilities. But this remark prevailed. For a younger brother Peter was becoming unbearably superior.

"Yes," replied Binks, "I mean to go."

X.

Binks had a consultation at nine on the night of the dance. When his clerk told him that it was fixed for that evening and hour, he thought of writing an apology to Mrs

Sinclair ; but he had told Peter he meant to go, and the apology was not written. "After all," he said to himself, "if I go late, I shall get the sooner away." The consultation was a tiresome one. The client was docile enough, overawed by the importance of counsel and anxious to hear what Binks had to say. But the solicitor insisted on monopolising the talk, and Binks could hardly get a word in edgeways. The question was small, and the matter might have been knocked off in a quarter of an hour ; but the agent was so anxious to show the client that he was getting value for the couple of guineas, that it was past ten o'clock before Binks bowed the gentlemen out. He returned to his room, pitched the papers impatiently into his bag, and then looked hard at the fire. Should he go to the dance ?

"No ; I'll be hanged if I stir out of here to-night ;" and he picked up a pipe, and felt in the pocket of his jacket for his tobacco-pouch. Instead of the tobacco-pouch he drew out a small parcel in white paper.

"Hulloa, what's this ? Oh yes, to be sure, those confounded gloves. Hang it all, I must go !"

Binks was a careful man. He had not bought a pair of white kids for a couple of

years; but, having bought them to-day, he was not going to throw them away.

It was a quarter to eleven when Binks reached Eglinton Crescent. There was nobody at the door of the drawing-room to announce him, and the hostess had left her place as the visitors had ceased to arrive. Binks was glad of it. He slipped into the room, lost himself in a small group of men who were standing near the door, and looked about him. Presently the music ceased, the dance was over, there was a rush through the doorway; the men who were standing beside Binks joined in the throng, and the lawyer was left alone in the corner. A short, stout, elderly man, who had been standing in a recess near the piano, bustled up to him, and clapping him on the shoulder in a cheery, familiar way, began—

“What, come now, my good fellow, aren’t you dancing? haven’t you got a partner? My daughter, I am sure, will be delighted to find you a——”

“Thanks; I hardly dance, and I have not the pleasure of Miss—ah—I’m afraid I don’t know your name, sir,” replied Binks, in his driest and stiffest tone, for if there was one thing Binks barred, it was familiarity on the part of a stranger.

"You don't know my name, sir! well, neither do I?"

"Dear me, how very remarkable!"

"I mean—you know quite well what I mean—who are you, sir?" replied Mr Sinclair warmly, for if Binks was cool, Mr Sinclair was peppery.

"That's of little consequence."

"What, in my own house! I have heard of such things being done in Edinburgh—without an invitation," spluttered Mr Sinclair.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Binks; "I was not aware that it was the host who addressed me. I am Mr Binks, at your service."

"What, Mr Theodosius Binks?"

"The same."

"Impossible! Mr Theodosius Binks sits in our pew in St George's Church."

"Then Mr Theodosius Binks must be a somewhat irregular attender, as, I assure you, he has not been in St George's Church for at least two years."

"Why, what's the matter, papa?" said a bright-looking girl, laying her hand upon Mr Sinclair's shoulder.

"The matter, Rose, my love!" replied Mr Sinclair, calming down at once; "why, this gentleman says that he is Mr Binks."

Rose stared at Binks.

"Mr Binks! well, it's not our Mr Binks, at any rate."

"And who is your Mr Binks, pray?" inquired Binks, half wishing it were he.

"Our Mr Binks! why, Mr Theodosius Binks, the advocate, to be sure."

"Well, I am he."

The situation was an embarrassing one, but it lent itself to explanations. It appeared that a gentleman, whom Binks readily identified as his professional brother Thomas Glover, had a sitting in the Sinclairs' pew in St George's Church; but, through some mistake in pointing out in the street, the Sinclairs had taken the idea, and held it all along, that Mr Thomas Glover was Mr Theodosius Binks. Mr Thomas Glover was so exemplary in his attendance at church, and so uniformly courteous in giving place and passing stools and books, that Mr Sinclair had insisted upon Mr Theodosius Binks getting a card for the dance.

When Binks realised the situation, he at first insisted upon going away at once as an uninvited guest. Fifty Mr Sinclairs would not have prevented him, but one Rose kept him.

Once fairly in for it, Binks tried to make

himself as agreeable as was possible amidst such uncongenial surroundings. He walked through the Lancers, he even condescended once or twice to take a round or two in the waltz, but of course he drew the line resolutely at the polka. The general company did not interest him much, but as a student of physiognomy he was a good deal struck by the singularly handsome and yet careworn face of a tall, graceful girl, who seemed to take quite as little interest as himself in the pleasures of the dance. There was a dazed, far-away look about her which he had often noticed in the insane, but which was most remarkable in a young girl moving about in a ball-room. Binks inquired of some one who this girl was.

"Oh, she's a daughter of the house; but you'll make nothing of her. Awfully pretty, you know, but seems to have nothing in her—not a word to say. I remember them years ago in Glasgow, when they were kids, and she was such a bright, lively girl. Something came over her at school, and she has never been the same since."

To the surprise of nobody more than himself, Binks returned to the drawing-room after supper. He had still another dance engage-

ment—that dance was with Rose Sinclair, who had been unable to give him one earlier, owing to the lateness of his application. It came at last, and it was the eightsome reel. Of course, Binks did not dream of attempting to dance it. He had once, indeed, seen it danced, and that was enough. So he waited near the door when the music struck up the warning notes, to catch Rose as she entered the room. She was a moment behind the general rush, and Binks, growing impatient, moved out on to the landing.

“Our dance, I believe?”

“Yes, Mr Glover—er, Mr Binks, I mean. Come along, we must get a place.”

“But I don’t dance the eightsome reel.”

“Oh, nonsense ; everybody dances the eightsome reel. Come, I’ll put you through it. I would not miss it for the world.”

Binks tried to protest, but in vain ; he was literally dragged into the drawing-room, his knees knocking together with fright. Luckily for him they were too late. Two sets were made up, and there was no room for more.

“What a pity,” said Rose ; “but it’s my own fault, I suppose. Let us stand here and watch them.”

They stood for a few moments ; but this was

poor sport for Binks, and he suggested that they should go somewhere and find a seat. The stair was crowded, which was a relief to Binks, with whose dignity and conventionalism a seat on the stair ill consorted. Rose led him up to the top of the flight, and then into a delightful little room, which they found unoccupied.

"And what room is this when it's at home?" inquired Binks.

"Oh, I really don't know how to describe it. We girls use it as a snugger, and for painting and general pottering about; don't you see the walls are all covered with our daubs?"

Binks glanced round, and saw that the room was profusely decorated with pictures—some framed, others unframed. Amongst them were a few framed photographs, and his eye rested upon one which he fancied he had seen before. It was too far off for him to be sure of it, and he crossed the room to look at it closely. It was the photograph of a house porch, with a group of girls, and underneath were the words, "Sea View House, 1885." Binks recognised it as the same as the photograph he had seen in Miss Oliver's house!

"I think I have seen that photograph before."

"Which?—oh, that one! That's a school

at St Andrews, where my sister Mary was. Had you any friends there?"

"No; but tell me, was the sister you refer to the tall girl in pink downstairs?"

"Yes; that's her you see standing under the pillar, close to the mistress,—she was a great favourite of hers."

Binks looked carefully, and then recrossed and seated himself beside his companion.

"Miss Sinclair," he began, pulling nervously at the fringe of the sofa,—“Miss Sinclair, I wish to ask you something.”

Rose changed colour. She had heard, and perhaps had some little experience, of swift conquests, but the rapidity of this fairly took her breath away.

"Yes, Mr Binks."

"Your sister looks dull—can you tell me why?"

Rose breathed a sigh of mingled disappointment and relief.

"How very sharp of you to notice that, Mr Binks. Yes, she *is* dull; but as to why, you would indeed be a benefactor if you could explain that! Poor Mary, she used to be the brightest of us all."

"And has this lasted long?"

"Oh yes, for years now, ever since she was

at that very school at St Andrews; it began then, and she has never been the same person since."

"But did anything happen then to account for it?"

"That I cannot tell. Something certainly happened that papa and mamma were very much annoyed about; but it was never explained to me. All I know is, they are always dreadfully afraid of her walking in her sleep—a thing, so far as I know, she never did."

"Will you introduce me to your sister?"

"With pleasure; but—of course you mustn't question her."

"Surely you do not dream I would say anything to hurt her?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, of course not; but the music has stopped. We must go down."

On returning to the drawing-room, Binks was duly introduced to the elder Miss Sinclair.

"Are you engaged for this dance?"

"I was engaged, but my partner has become a fixture, I believe, in the supper-room."

"Well, I am afraid I am too lazy to dance; but your sister has introduced me to a charming room—shall we stroll upstairs?"

Binks was in luck, for again the room was unoccupied.

"I recognised a photograph over there," he began.

"Oh, that one!—that's a place near Dollar an uncle of mine had for several summers."

"That was not the one I meant. But tell me, is your uncle's name Russel?"

"Yes; do you know him?"

"I do not; but I suppose that is where you lost your ring?"

"Yes; but what do you know about that?"

"I have heard the story, but I did not connect you with it until this moment."

"How very odd! How clever you are!"

"No; but the photo I recognised was that one of the group of girls at the schoolhouse door—Miss Oliver's school at St Andrews, I see."

Miss Sinclair's face had brightened up wonderfully as they talked of Dollar, but it darkened down again to settled gloom the moment St Andrews was referred to.

"Yes, that was Miss Oliver's school."

"You were there in 1885?"

"I was."

"I was over at St Andrews the other day, and I looked through the house, which is at present to let. I thought a good deal of the house. What a jolly bedroom that is on

the first floor, looking into the garden and over the wall beyond down towards the sea!"

"That was my room."

"I took a walk one day out to a picturesque village called Strathkinnes, three or four miles away. Do you know it?"

Binks looked at his companion keenly, but unmoved she replied—

"No, I was never there."

"I met a man who told me a curious story about an old woman who used to scramble about these garden walls near Sea View; did you ever meet an old woman there?"

Miss Sinclair made no reply; a vacant, misty look lay upon her eyes; she seemed like a person, half awake, still striving to retain around her the creatures of the dream-world.

"An old woman," said Binks; "don't you remember an old woman?"

Miss Sinclair drew herself up. "I would rather not discuss this, Mr Binks. I had once a strange dream about an old woman, and what you say unpleasantly recalls it. Let us go downstairs."

"Stay one moment, Miss Sinclair. I know I am treading on delicate ground. But per-

haps I can clear up the matter. Tell me, was there any writing in this dream?"

Miss Sinclair started, and with more animation than she had yet shown she asked—

"How in the world do you know that?"

"I don't know it, I merely guessed it."

"Yes, yes, there was writing. I wrote down something to remind me of something else; but, of course, as it was only a dream, the writing was lost; and oh, Mr Binks, if you knew how that has hung about my soul all these years;" and the tears started to her eyes.

Binks made no reply for a moment, but, taking his overcoat voucher from his pocket, he scribbled something on the back of it, and handed it to Miss Sinclair.

"Tell me, was that what you wrote?"

"Ring under stone—V. B. B. C." She read it over three times, each time with greater eagerness.

"Yes, yes, I do believe that is what I wrote," said Miss Sinclair in a husky whisper.

"But where did you find it?"

"I will explain that again; but first tell me, can you interpret these cabalistic words, V. B. B. C.?"

"V. B. B. C. There is something vaguely

in my mind." She pressed her fingers to her forehead, and was silent for a little. Then she said, slowly and confidently—

"V. B. is Vicar's Bridge."

"And the B. C.?"

"There is a copestone on the parapet with the letters 'B. C.' upon it. The boys, my cousins, used jocularly to point out that stone as incontestable evidence of the great antiquity of the bridge."

XI.

Next morning, Mr Alexander M'Klink, advocate, received a note from Binks requesting him to be so kind as to take a couple of motions, and get a Procedure Roll case put off, as Binks had been called suddenly to the country on important business.

M'Klink, being obliging, did the necessary work, and being a gossip, with abundance of leisure, he spent the forenoon at the fireplace in the hall retailing the incident of Binks' letter, with this oft-repeated comment—"We all know what that means!"

Meanwhile Binks was on his way to Dollar. He reached that station early in the forenoon,

and half an hour's walk brought him to the Vicar's Bridge over the Devon. The parapet copestone, with B. C. in large letters upon it, was there as Miss Sinclair had told him; but there was nothing else to suggest that the bridge dated from before the Christian era. On the contrary, everything was spick and span, and Binks searched the wall under the stone in vain for cranny or crevice which might contain the ring. This was a keen disappointment. It occurred to him that perhaps the ring might have been secreted by reaching over on the other side of the wall. He reached over, therefore, and felt round below the stone, but he discovered nothing. He leant farther and farther over, peering about and passing his hand along the lime between the stones. At last he had reached so far over that his feet were off the ground, and he was hanging across the parapet—his legs on one side, and his head, arms, and shoulders on the other, just as if he had been a drunk man hung out to dry.

Suddenly Binks felt a violent tug at his coat-tails, which pulled him fairly back staggering on to his feet on the road. He turned sharp round, and a burly workman stood before him.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Binks.

"Mean, is't! Mon, are ye clean demented? I thocht ye waur gaun ower a'the-gither."

Binks could not give a quite satisfactory account of himself, but he weakly muttered something about examining the bridge; and then a bright idea striking him, he asked the man, who looked like a mason, if he knew when last the bridge was pointed.

"Pinted! no' sax months syne. I was at the job mysel'."

"You didn't find anything when you were about the job?"

"Find onything! No; what wud a body find about an auld brig?"

"Well, I don't know; but I once heard some story about a ring being hid about here, and never found again."

"A ring, did ye say? That minds me noo—I did find an auld bit ring in a hole atween twa stanes, jest whaur ye waur hangin' ower the noo; but it was a' black, and I thocht it was yin o' yer travellin' tinker's tuppenny ha'penny geegaws. The ainly queer thing was hoo in the warld it had gotten intae that hole in the brig."

"And what did you do with it?" gasped Binks.

"Do wi't? I dinna weel mind noo; it's like eneuch I tuk it hame to the missis."

Binks was not long in discovering that the mason, whose name was Bryce, lived at Blairingone village, not a mile distant, and he persuaded the man to accompany him thither. They found Mrs Bryce, a stout, pleasant-looking, middle-aged woman, busy with her housework, but she made the stranger welcome.

"Ye'll mind, Mary Ann, yon auld ring I bracht ye hame yin day frae the brig?"

"Ay; but what about it? It was a gilt ring wi' wee gless stanes, was it no'?"

"You haven't lost it!" exclaimed Binks.

"Na, na, I hae it a' safe, if it's o' value tae onybody."

"It'll be ben the hoose, in yer wardrap drawer, I'm thinkin'," said Bryce. "I'll gang ben and fetch it."

"Ye needna fash, Jeemes; it's no' ben the hoose."

"Whaur is't, then? Let the gentleman see't, wull ye no'?"

Mrs Bryce coloured, but made no reply.

"My good woman, don't be afraid, I won't

steal it from you, I assure you ; but I'll make it well worth your while to sell it me," said Binks.

Still there was no response.

"Gudesake, what ails the wumman?" exclaimed the astonished husband.

"I'll gang ben the hoose and fetch it," said Mrs Bryce at last.

"But ye said nae twa minnits syne that it wasna ben the hoose. I dinna ken what's ta'en the wife."

Mrs Bryce said nothing, but disappeared from the kitchen. In an instant she returned with a garter in her hand; and then Binks understood why the lady had been so coy. The garter was an elastic one, fastened with a ring and button; and the ring—yes, there sewn into the garter of this peasant woman—was the ring which Mary Sinclair had got from her dead sister, which Cooper had hid at the Vicar's Bridge, which Binks had searched for at Strathkinnes—the ring which had driven Cooper to the madhouse, and brought Mrs M'Ara to the grave, had blighted all Mary Sinclair's youth, and had shed a flood of romantic light round the prosaic life of that pragmatistical Edinburgh lawyer, Theodosius Binks!

XII.

The news of the discovery of the ring had a most beneficial effect upon Cooper. A cloud seemed lifted from his mind. He did not recover all at once, and he is still deemed peculiar. But he has long been discharged from all restraint; he maintains himself by private coaching, and he has taken to literary labours, in which he may yet make his mark.

It was a proud moment for Binks when he restored Mary Sinclair her ring—indeed, there was but one happier incident in his life, and that was when he gave her sister Rose a ring.

AN IRREGULAR MARRIAGE.

I.

“MR WALKER!”

It was very provoking, for I was busy with some papers, but there was no help for it, the summons must be obeyed. I was seated in the law-room of the Parliament House, Edinburgh, and somebody wanted me to come out to the hall to speak to him. The law-room is the holy place of the Scottish bar. No profane feet dare enter there. An advocate in the law-room may come to you, but you cannot go to him. If you make the attempt, you will have cause to repent it. The moment your vulgar foot has crossed the sacred threshold, one of the attendants, who sit like watch-dogs near the doorway, will hurl himself with ruthless impetuosity at your throat, and, before you realise the situation, you will find yourself

hustled ignominiously out into the hall, amidst the audible hilarity of the bewigged brotherhood. No, if you would speak with an advocate who is in the law-room, you must go round to a glass window which looks into that room from the south corridor. There, after you have satisfied yourself that your quarry is in the earth, you must shout his name down a speaking-tube that leads into the law-room. Then, if you have spoken distinctly, you are all right, and you may go away round to the door to await your man. There is no recorded instance of an advocate having refused to obey the summons of the speaking-tube. In nine cases out of ten, the advocate summoned does not know who may be wanting him, and in the tenth case, where he catches a glimpse of the man at the trumpet, it does not avail him that this man happens to be a bore or a beggar. He is still obliged to go, for otherwise the bore or the beggar will be back in a moment, and his repeated summonses will render the advocate who refuses to obey them a nuisance to the busy men beside him. So the advocate who is called always comes. The best ferret sometimes fails to bolt his rabbit, but an audible shout down the speaking-trumpet of the law-room never fails to bolt an advocate.

Out he comes, and always by the same hole—the door into the Parliament Hall. One hears fabulous stories of great salmon raised by small trout-flies, but in the Parliament House this is no fable. Every cast down the speaking-trumpet of the law-room raises an advocate. Even a ragged newsboy could in a moment raise the Lord Advocate himself.

Well, there I was in the law-room, and out I must go, in obedience to the call—"Mr Walker!" Mine was a very hard case, for when "Mr Walker" was called, it was two to one that I was not the party wanted at all. At that time there were two other Walkers in the Faculty (one is now a Sheriff-Substitute, the other has disappeared from the scene, and it is said he has taken holy orders in Australia). But I was the senior of the three Walkers, and I alone had a right to be summoned as "Mr Walker." Had this right been always recognised by the public, it would have saved me a world of trouble. But unfortunately ignorant people were in the way of calling "Mr Walker" when it ought to have been "Mr Emanuel Walker," or "Mr Dugald Walker." At other times some thoughtless lad would have the unspeakable effrontery to summon me as "Mr Peter Walker." When

"Mr Walker" was called, I always made a point of asserting my rights by answering the summons, although I might have the best reason to believe that it was Mr Emanuel, or Mr Dugald, who was wanted. It was better, I felt, to sacrifice a little time and shoe leather than to tolerate any infraction of my rights.

So now I obeyed the call. I laid down my pen, and stepped out into the hall. I looked about me and waited for a minute or two, but nobody accosted me, and at length, satisfied that it was not I who was wanted, I returned to my papers.

"Mr Walker!"

It was the same voice again, and I glanced cautiously round to see if either Mr Emanuel or Mr Dugald was in the law-room. Yes, there was Emanuel slipping out of the door. Clearly he must be the man wanted. I bit my lips, and turned again to my papers. But a moment afterwards there was a tap on my shoulder. It was Emanuel back again.

"I think," he said, "you must be wanted. I heard my name, and I went out, but there was nobody wanting me."

"Thank you," I replied with icy coldness, as I rose to go out the second time; "I did not hear *your* name."

It was all right this time. A street porter was at the door waiting for me. Unfamiliar with the ways of the place, he had waited at the window on the first occasion, after shouting down the trumpet as directed, instead of coming round to meet me at the door. He handed me a parcel—a soft parcel neatly wrapped up in brown paper, and addressed, in what looked like a lady's hand—

“PETER WALKER, Esq.,
Advocate,
 PARLIAMENT HOUSE.”

It is not usual to have such parcels delivered to one at the Parliament House, and I questioned the man as to who had given it him. It appeared that a young lady had accosted him in Hanover Street, handed him the parcel, and ordered him to carry it at once to the Parliament House and deliver it into my own hands. This was all the information the porter could give me, so I turned to the parcel itself for an explanation. I opened a corner of it, and found some sort of woollen texture of a bluish colour. I now began to suspect some practical joke, so I shut the parcel up in the meantime and put it in my bag.

That afternoon I awaited with some im-

patience at my rooms the arrival of my bag from the Court. It came at last, and I hastened to explore the parcel. I found that it contained six pairs of what I took to be knickerbocker stockings, made of very fine wool, a piece of chalk, and a sheet of paper, on which were the following words in the same handwriting as the address—

“If Mr Walker is willing to assist a female in bitter distress, let him accept the accompanying gift as a token of her goodwill. She will to-morrow morning examine the base of the statue of George IV. in George Street; and if she finds a cross marked with chalk upon the south side of it, she will regard it as an assurance that Mr Walker is willing to help her.”

I have had many strange communications in my day, but this parcel—stockings, chalk, and note together—was the most mysterious and extraordinary thing ever placed in my hands. It might be only a practical joke, but if so, I could not see within twenty yards of the point of it, and somehow I had a deep inward conviction that it was not a practical joke, but a very earnest and despairing appeal to me for help.

My friend Rodger looked in for a smoke

that evening, and I determined to confide the matter to him, and take his advice. Rodger was my most intimate chum. He was a married man, and perhaps it is a fortunate arrangement when, of two companions, the one is married and the other a bachelor. There is a totality in the sum of their experiences. Rodger examined the parcel, the paper wrapper, the address, the string, the chalk, and the note, all very carefully, and I could tell by the quick, short puffs of his pipe that he was very much puzzled. Last of all he came to the stockings. These I had not yet very carefully examined myself; and whilst he was overhauling one pair I picked up another.

"Well," I said, "the lady, whoever she is, certainly gives me credit for having very small feet. I'll never get these on."

"I daresay not," replied Rodger dryly; "these are ladies' stockings."

"Ladies' stockings!" I exclaimed; "why the mischief does any one send me ladies' stockings?"

"I don't know, I am sure, my dear fellow. You had better go and inquire of George IV.'s statue."

We talked the matter over, and I soon found that Rodger was convinced that the whole

thing was a practical joke. His advice to me was to take no notice of the communication.

Notwithstanding the laceration to my feelings on discovering the sex of the stockings, I was still of a contrary opinion. The interest of the discussion, however, would have been entirely speculative, but for the necessity of at once determining the crucial question—Should I, or should I not, chalk a cross upon the pedestal of the statue of George IV.? Rodger was dead against it, and tried to convince me that I should just be making a fool of myself, that I should certainly be watched, and that doubtless the whole thing was an impudent scheme to make me ridiculous, by involving me in a mock-heroic intrigue with some disreputable female. The good fellow grew quite earnest in the matter, as he insisted upon the injury which the least breath of scandal would do to a professional man's reputation. At last he fairly talked me over, and it was agreed that I should take no further notice of the communication. It was midnight when Rodger at length took his departure, but he was scarcely gone when the desire to chalk a cross upon the pedestal of the statue of George IV. came over me with overwhelming force. I tried to struggle

against it, for Rodger had really convinced me of the extreme foolishness of a professional man of my standing compromising himself in a matter of the kind. But desire gradually overpowered my judgment. It was like the intemperate man who vows to his friend that he will never touch a drop again, and really means what he says, but who, the moment he is left alone, is overcome by an insatiable craving for strong drink, to which he rapidly succumbs. Rodger was not ten minutes out of the house before my judgment was driven in headlong confusion from the field. I seized my hat and coat and sallied forth, but ere I had gone twenty paces I recollected that I had forgotten the chalk. I turned back to get it, but the chalk had disappeared. I searched the mantelpiece, the tables and chairs, under the table, everywhere; but it was nowhere to be found. No, it was clear that Rodger, unable to trust me, had made matters sure by taking the chalk away with him. I was furious at the indignity, and maddened almost to distraction at the loss. The rage of the dipsomaniac, when he finds that his friend has taken away the key, was nothing to mine over the loss of that piece of chalk. My head was on fire. I felt that if I did not chalk a cross upon the

pedestal of the George IV. statue that night, my life was blighted and blasted. But I am not the man to succumb to despair. Various wild schemes floated through my brain. I would go down to Rodger's, ring him up, and insist that he should return me the chalk. But this plan did not please me. Rodger might talk me over again. Chalk! yes, there was chalk in plenty at the grocer's shop not ten doors along, and my soul was perishing for lack of a morsel. I looked up the grocer's address in the Directory. He lived at Newington. What of that? I could pick up a cab, no doubt, yet. I should go over to Newington, rouse up the grocer, and offer him five pounds, or fifty, if necessary, to come and open his shop and give me a piece of chalk. The story would come out, perhaps, and I should make myself the talk of the town; but again, what of that? Better to be the laughing-stock of Edinburgh than to lose my soul for the want of a piece of chalk. I was out of the door in a moment, and was hurrying off at a run, when I stumbled up against two men who were sauntering along the pavement. I would hardly have paused even to apologise, but one of them seized me by the arm—

"Hulloa, Walker, is your house on fire?"

It was Catto, a man of my own years, and with him Speid, two years our junior. I was obliged to pull up, and I am afraid I mumbled some falsehood about going to the post.

"Well, there's no hurry about that, surely; the pillar-box won't run away, and the letters are not collected till one," laughed Speid. "Come now, old boy, that cock won't fight. Tell us all about it!"

"I have nothing to tell, I assure you; and for that matter, why are you fellows on the prowl so late?"

"Oh, we've just had a quiet little pool at the Club."

The Club! pool! chalk!—it was a revelation!—why had I not thought of this before? I left my astonished brethren gaping where they stood, and went at a hand-gallop for the University Club. I rang the bell, dashed past the night-porter, and up to the billiard-room. The light was out, but I had no difficulty in finding the chalk. Oh, how I clutched it! Then I was out again, away along the deserted pavements to the statue, and did not I make that cross broad and distinct?—a St Andrew's cross almost from corner to corner of the pedestal.

Rodger passes that statue on his way to the Court every morning. When we met next morning he gave me one reproachful look, but he said nothing, and from that day to this we have never exchanged explanations on the subject. In the afternoon I received a note in the lady's handwriting. It ran thus :—

“The cross is gratefully acknowledged. Over the Dean Bridge, near the end of Clarendon Crescent, there is a pillar letter-box, with a pump close beside it. The lady will await Mr Walker there to-night at 8.30.”

Of course I resolved to keep the rendezvous, and at eight o'clock I sallied forth. I determined, however, to proceed with some circumspection. I should not run blindfold into a trap. I should reconnoitre carefully before I accosted any one, or allowed any female to accost me. Accordingly, instead of taking my stand near the pump and the pillar, I strolled about on the opposite side of the road, beside the railings of the Buckingham Terrace gardens. It was a quarter past eight when I got there, and for ten minutes I saw nobody except a few stray passers-by walking at a very business pace. But about 8.25 my attention was attracted by

the figure of a female approaching the pump in a very leisurely way from the direction of the bridge. As she passed the pump and the pillar she slackened her pace still more, and seemed to glance keenly about her. This looked like my business, and I watched her closely. She had not proceeded more than twenty yards past the pillar when she turned again and slowly retraced her steps. On reaching the pillar she stood still for several minutes, looking along the road in either direction. I watched her thus for some little time. At times she paced slowly backwards and forwards, at other times she stood still beside the pillar looking about her. It was quite clear that this young woman, whoever she was, had an assignation at this corner at the present hour. I determined to encounter her. So I went a few yards along the road towards the bridge, and crossed over when her back was turned. Then I sauntered along in her direction. She had turned again, and we met face to face. She had on a black veil, so I could not discern her features, and all I made out was that she was in deep mourning, and had a tall, graceful figure. She gave one quick glance as I approached, but then she turned away her head and took

no further notice of me. I sauntered along a few paces, and then I turned, and again we met, and with a like result. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that she had stopped at the pillar-box. Changing my tactics, I wheeled sharp round, and approaching her a third time I stopped in front of her and muttered something about its being a fine night. I fancied that, even through the thick folds of her veil, I saw a lightning flash in her eye, as, with mingled contempt and indignation in her tone, she rebuked my impertinence with—

“I think you have made a mistake.”

I feebly tried to mutter something about its being no mistake, but she cut me short with a withering—“Begone, sir.”

I went.

Next day I received another letter in the same handwriting as before, as follows:—

“The lady waited for Mr Walker from half-past eight till nine last night, and was much disappointed he did not come. She will repair to the same spot at the same hour to-night, and she trusts Mr Walker will be able to meet her. As the lady is very nervous, and was much put about by being accosted by a stranger last night, perhaps

Mr Walker will kindly carry a white pocket-handkerchief in his left hand."

I was much puzzled by this communication after my experiences of the night before, but I determined to try again. I felt satisfied that the lady whom I had accosted was my correspondent, and that she had failed to recognise me, so I resolved to go straight to the point next time. That evening the experiences of the preceding evening were repeated up to the point where I crossed the road. Then I took out my white handkerchief, and, holding it before me in my left hand, I walked straight towards where the lady was standing. I saw her turn and walk quickly towards me when she noticed the handkerchief, but when she was almost within a yard of me she gave a sudden start and turned hastily away. I was not to be denied, however, and placing myself by her side I said quite clearly and quietly—

"Excuse me, but I believe you are waiting for Mr Walker."

"And who are you, pray?"

"I am Mr Walker, at your service."

She stopped and looked at me severely. "Mr Walker! Oh no, you are not Mr Walker—that is, not the Mr Walker I

meant. There must be some terrible mistake!"

"I cannot say whom you meant, but I am the person you addressed—Mr Peter Walker, advocate."

"But the gentleman who was pointed out to me as Mr Walker the advocate was quite different looking."

"Possibly, for there are three Mr Walkers, advocates. What like is the man you are in quest of?"

"Oh, not a bit like you; a tall thin man, with red hair and a prominent nose."

"Ah! then it was Mr Dugald Walker who was pointed out to you."

"Oh dear! what a dreadful mistake! I am so grieved for having troubled you."

"Pray don't distress yourself on that score; but can I do anything to put you in the way of meeting Mr Dugald Walker? I shall be so pleased to help you."

"You are very good, but, now you are here, and are so very kind, perhaps you could help me just as well as the other Mr Walker?"

"My poor services are entirely at your disposal, Miss—er—Miss——"

"Mrs Stewart is my name. And was it you, then, who chalked the base of the statue?"

"It was."

"How good of you! And did you get the little present all right?"

"The stockings? Oh yes; but what am I to do with them?"

"They are for Mrs Walker."

"Mrs Walker! Dear me, how funny! There is no Mrs Walker; but of course there is a Mrs Dugald Walker. Shall I send them to her?"

"No Mrs Walker!" exclaimed Mrs Stewart, drawing herself up and retreating a step. "I did not think of that. I am afraid, then, I cannot accept your help. I ought not to be here; I must really go home."

"You must judge as to that for yourself. I quite understand your difficulty; but may not even an unmarried man after all be a gentleman?"

"Oh, of course, I did not mean to imply, but——"

"Come," I said, eagerly holding out my hand and looking her straight in the face, "can't you trust me?"

Her gloved hand was placed in mine for a moment.

"Yes, I'll trust you."

Then we strolled slowly out towards the old toll-bar, and she unfolded to me her extraordinary story.

II.

I am not going to tell Mrs Stewart's story exactly as she told it me. No woman ever yet told a long story of events in which she was personally interested in a quite connected and coherent manner. She is sure to be full of prolix explanations and details where all is plain sailing, and elliptical and enigmatical where the incidents are involved and require to be stated with some precision to render the narrative intelligible. Besides, there are some details of the story which I did not get from Mrs Stewart herself at the time, but found out afterwards through other sources.

Mrs Stewart, whose maiden name was Mary Havelant, was the daughter of a physician in Exeter. Both her parents were dead, and she was poorly left, but not in absolute poverty. Having no home, and being accomplished and pushing, instead of trying to make the best of it on her £150 a-year in some ladies' boarding-house, she determined to strike out for herself, and she was fortunate enough to obtain a situation as governess in the family of Mr Bell, a wealthy Glasgow merchant, who was wintering at Torquay for the benefit of his health.

When summer came the Bells returned to the Clyde, and brought Miss Havelant with them to Scotland. Mr Bell's son John, who was fresh from Oxford, was just entering upon business in Glasgow, and the family found him already installed in the house when they returned from the south. John Bell had a friend, George Stewart, who twenty years ago was as well known as any young man in Glasgow. Like young Bell, Stewart was the son of a merchant prince, but, unlike Bell, he was not happy at home. George was one of those unfortunates who are blessed with mothers who believe that their children are made solely for the happiness of their mothers. Mrs Stewart was devoted to her children, and delighted in their society; but she had no ambitions for them, and no fears, save that they should ever be sundered from their mother. So long as she had them beside her she was content, and it never occurred to her that a life may be wasted even on a mother's lap. There are some children who fit in admirably with this sort of thing, but George was not one of these. Always restless and bustling, he was a source of continual anxiety to his mother; whilst she, poor woman, was the cause of constant vexation to him. George was twelve before he was emancipated

from his sisters' governesses, and even then it was only after a terrible struggle that he saved himself from falling into the arms of a private tutor, and so far asserted himself as to carry the point that he should go to a day-school. A boarding-school, spite of many entreaties and struggles, he never attained to. When school-days were done with, George wished to accompany his friend Bell to Oxford, but this was not to be listened to, and he had to content himself with classes at Glasgow University. Tired of these, he wished to go up for the army, but again the strenuous resistance of his mother prevailed, and he could only obtain permission to take a commission in the militia, and even that not without great difficulty. His father would have liked George to enter his own counting-house, but George did not fancy commerce, and his mother rather deprecated the idea,—it would take the lad away from the house all day. So, to his mother's entire satisfaction, George Stewart grew up into manhood an aimless loafer, with no duties other than to prolong the breakfast and to cut the cake at afternoon tea. But, although content with things as they were, Mrs Stewart was yet at times troubled with a vague apprehension. Was this to last for ever? would her George

be always beside her? The question was always dismissed as soon as stated, and, indeed, its very suggestion was only tolerated when it was purely subjective. Mrs Stewart was generally sweet-tempered; but she could be roused, and she always was roused, when any other person suggested that some time—even in the dim and distant future—George might take unto himself a wife and wings.

The Bells had not long returned from Torquay before George Stewart made the acquaintance of Miss Havelant, and George had not long made the acquaintance of Miss Havelant before she became to him a person of supreme interest. Mrs Stewart had for some time difficulty in understanding why George was so much less in the house than was his wont, and what took him so often to the Bells'. But George had sisters, and sisters have eyes, and tongues too sometimes, and at last an explanation reached Mrs Stewart's ears of the sudden white-heat to which the intimacy of her George with John Bell had developed. Then, of course, there was a storm; and for fully a month poor old Mr Stewart, the most amiable of men, found his life made miserable by the bitter struggle between his wife and his son. George was not to be bent. To her amazement Mrs Stewart

found herself baffled. George absolutely refused to give up the girl, announced his intention of marrying her on the earliest opportunity, and appealed to his father to supply the needful. The dear old gentleman would fain have kept out of the quarrel. But when appealed to by both his wife and his son, Mr Stewart did what nine persons out of ten do in such circumstances—he sided with his wife. Perhaps he was right. It secures peace at night, at all events. But where the maternal lightnings had failed, it was unlikely that the feeble paternal thunders would prevail. The refusal of supplies was awkward, but George would not give up the girl.

It was in these circumstances that it occurred to George that although a hurricane might be inconvenient, after all a hurricane would blow past. He determined to marry Miss Havelant, trusting that, once all was over and irrevocable, his parents would come round and submit with the best grace they could to the inevitable. With some difficulty he overcame Miss Havelant's scruples, and induced her to fall in with his proposals. Twice a-week two of the Bell girls came through to Edinburgh for singing lessons, accompanied by their governess. On one of these occasions, after Miss Havelant

had escorted her wards to their master's rooms in Charlotte Street, she made a pretext for not waiting during the lesson, went out, met George Stewart in Charlotte Square, and accompanied him down to Young Street, where they walked at random into the first lawyer's office they found. Chance was not kind to them, for the office they entered was that of John Scraggs.

Scraggs was one of the fathers of those moral nuisances, the low-class speculative agents, and his appetite for widows' houses was quite as insatiable as that of any of his progeny, which is saying a good deal. He was the first to initiate the system of scouring the columns of the press for accounts of accidents and mishaps, and then at once writing to the injured party, pointing out what an excellent ground of action he had against his employer, and offering to conduct the case. He traded upon the aversion which every capitalist, no matter how good his case, has to litigate with a man of straw; and even where real wrong had been inflicted, Scraggs would settle with alacrity, in total indifference to the interests of his clients, when he received an offer of costs which made it worth his while to do so.

It was into the office of this gentleman that George Stewart and Miss Havelant stepped,

and then, in the presence of Scraggs and his son, they both put their names to a sheet of paper upon which Scraggs had written :—

“We, George Stewart and Mary Havelant, hereby take each other as lawful spouses, and declare that we are man and wife : In witness whereof we have subscribed these presents, written by John Scraggs, solicitor, Edinburgh, upon this sheet of paper, this 17th day of July 1890, before these witnesses, the said John Scraggs and Morgan Scraggs, his clerk.”

This made a binding marriage by Scots law.

George wished to take the document with him, but Scraggs insisted that it was necessary to leave it, in the pretext that he would get the marriage registered, so it was locked away in his repositories. George had some further business with the lawyer. He was possessed of some £1500 of his own, the accumulation of large money tips from his parents and other wealthy relatives. This sum he had drawn out from different investments, and he now handed it to Scraggs, with instructions to invest it in safe real security and settle it on his wife. Scraggs promised to attend to the matter, and was bowing the young couple out, when it suddenly occurred to Mrs Stewart to suggest to her husband that he had better get a receipt

for his money. With many apologies Scraggs made out and handed to George the necessary document. Then Mrs Stewart returned to Charlotte Street to look after her wards, whilst George Stewart took train by a different route for Glasgow. Their married life had lasted seventeen minutes.

That same evening George Stewart was summoned to London, where his father, who was in town on business, had been taken seriously ill. For a fortnight Mr Stewart hovered between life and death, but then he rallied somewhat, and was able to return with George to Scotland. When George reached Glasgow he found that his wife had left with the Bells, who had gone to summer quarters near Finglen on Loch Tay. The improvement in Mr Stewart's condition was not maintained and after lingering a few weeks longer he passed away. A few days after the funeral George announced his intention of going to Crieff to see Mr Alfred Marshall, a friend of his, and the junior partner of Marshall, Turner, & Marshall, writers, Glasgow, his family's solicitors, who was residing at Crieff for his holidays. The announcement perturbed his mother somewhat, for she could not understand why George should put himself about to go and consult Mr

Alfred Marshall, whilst Mr Marshall, senior, was at hand and attending to everything. However, the matter was not one to quarrel about, and George took his departure. It appeared, however, that George had made a mistake. He left Glasgow on the 14th September, but already on the 13th Mr Alfred Marshall had returned to Glasgow, his holidays being over, and the house he had occupied at Crieff was shut up. Whether or not George called at the house and found it vacant, was never ascertained. From the moment he left Glasgow on the morning of September 14, he disappeared from view. No vestige or trace of him could be discovered.

To his wife, subsequent to his marriage, George had written a number of letters, but there were only two of them which contained anything to throw light upon the matter. In one, written prior to his father's death, he mentioned that he had been in Edinburgh, and found Mr Scraggs "most unsatisfactory," both as regarded the investment and "the document of a deeper debt." In the other letter, written subsequent to his father's death, he stated that he had again been in Edinburgh, and got "the document" up from "the old rascal." The explanation about the money matter was, how-

ever, he stated, as unsatisfactory as ever, and he announced his intention of going to Crieff to take Alfred Marshall into his confidence, and consult him about the whole business. He added, "Is it a far cry from Crieff to Tayside?"

Young Mrs Stewart heard no more from her husband, although she wrote him several times to the Western Club. At the end of September she returned with the Bells to Glasgow, but still there was no communication from George, and soon she became conscious that there was a disquieting reticence on the part of the Bells about George Stewart. One morning, a fortnight after the return to Glasgow, Mrs Bell called the governess to her room and dismissed her. No reason was assigned for this step. She was paid a month's salary, a cab was ordered, her things were bundled into it, and she was told to go. She at once repaired to the Western Club, and inquired if George Stewart had been there lately. No; Mr Stewart had not been seen for a month. Had any letters been received? Yes; but Mrs Stewart, his mother, had called the other day and got these away with her. Baffled at the Club, Mrs Stewart went boldly to her mother-in-law's house and asked for George. He

was not at home. Then she insisted on seeing the old lady. There was a stormy scene between the two women. The mother refused all information; she even declined to state what she had done with the letters. Then, stung by the old lady's taunts, young Mrs Stewart declared the marriage, and, as a wife, demanded news of her husband. The announcement was received with indignant derision, and when Mr Scraggs was referred to, the mother-in-law laughed as scornfully as ever, but made a note of the name. At last the young wife was driven from the house as an impudent impostor.

Two days later young Mrs Stewart travelled to Edinburgh, and repaired to the office of Mr Scraggs for assistance. To her surprise she met her mother-in-law coming out as she went in. Scraggs she found hopeless. Assistance or advice he would give none; his stereotyped answer to all inquiries was the formula that he had "strict instructions from Mr Stewart himself to give no information."

So the matter ended, and so it had stood for four years when I met Mrs Stewart. There could be no doubt, so far as I could ascertain, that the Stewart family believed that George was alive, and either abroad or in hiding.

Their theory, probably, was that, having got entangled to a certain extent with Miss Havellant, he was staying out of the way until she should have disappeared from the scene. How much Scraggs had told old Mrs Stewart it was impossible to say. Not much, probably. But there could be little doubt that she had made it well worth his while to be on her side, and refuse all information and assistance to the would-be wife. In Glasgow society George Stewart had ceased to be much talked about. The mystery had become a chronic one.

Young Mrs Stewart, on the other hand, strange to say, firmly believed that George was dead,—he had fallen into some pit or pool,—and she rather resented any suggestion that perhaps, after all, he might be alive. The truth was that she preferred to think of George as dead, rather than as alive and forgetful of her. She had ceased, therefore, to have any hopes or anxieties as to finding her husband. Her one absorbing desire was to right herself, to vindicate her position as George's widow, and so revenge herself upon his mother. For the past four years she had lived in lodgings between Edinburgh and Glasgow, helplessly striving to find something or somebody to help her. During all

this time she had never placed herself in the hands of any responsible business man, deterred therefrom perhaps by her ignorance of Scotland and of business, and by the warning afforded by her treatment at the hands of Scraggs. The long strain and weary anxiety had affected her health and clouded her mind. She was not absolutely insane on any subject, but she was eccentric to a degree, and prone to sudden and wayward impulses. Her appeal to me, or rather to Mr Dugald Walker, was brought about accidentally. The landlady of her Edinburgh lodgings had a litigation with some people to whom she had let her drawing-room floor for the winter, and who wished to shy off on the pretext that the house was infested with beetles. In this case Mr Dugald Walker happened to be counsel; and the good lady, in telling the story, was loud in the praises of the courtesy and ability of her advocate, Mr Walker. To this circumstance was due Mrs Stewart's approach to me in mistake for Mr Dugald, and to the disturbed state of her mind may be ascribed the ridiculously eccentric manner in which that approach was made.

Such was the strange story of Mrs Stewart, and the problem which I had to face, with a

view to assist her, was how her marriage to George Stewart was to be established. There was at the outset a preliminary difficulty which seemed almost insuperable, viz., the uncertainty as to what had become of Stewart, and whether he was dead or alive. Doubtless, in the circumstances, the law would presume him to be still alive; and I could find no precedent for an action of declarator of marriage against a defender not cited personally and not to be found. Apart from this difficulty, I had doubts as to the sufficiency of the evidence. The references to "the document" in George's letters were certainly confirmatory of Mrs Stewart's story; but, on the other hand, unfortunately neither the word "wife" or "husband," nor any direct allusion to the alleged occurrence at Mr Scraggs's office, was to be found in any of the letters, which all began "Dearest Mary," and were subscribed "Your loving George." Everything would turn on the testimony of Scraggs, and of securing favourable testimony in that quarter I had little hopes. Before approaching Scraggs I tried to exhaust all other possible sources of information. The Bells could tell me nothing. Miss Havelant had been dismissed on the representation of old Mrs Stewart that she was carrying on a

clandestine correspondence in terms of unseemly familiarity with her son George. Mr Alfred Marshall I found most courteous and kindly, but he could not help me. Honestly, he told me, he really knew nothing of the matter, and neither, he believed, did his father. He added, with a touch of bitterness, that he understood that Mrs Stewart, senior, was in the hands of an Edinburgh solicitor in the matter. The only bit of information of any importance that I got from Mr Marshall was, that there had been forwarded to him from Crieff, after he left that place, a letter from George Stewart, dated 13th September, announcing his intention of coming to Crieff to consult him "on a difficult and delicate matter." He added—"My mind is divided between regard for my mother's feelings at this trying juncture, and my pressing obligation of honour and duty to another." This again was certainly so far confirmatory of Mrs Stewart's story.

Before approaching Scraggs himself, I determined to try whether Morgan, his estimable son, could not be more easily negotiated. The character of this youth was such that I could hardly approach him personally. Accordingly I put the matter in the hands of a private detective, who I trusted would be able to

extract from Morgan in his cups information which could hardly be expected either from the father or the son if sought by a direct attack. But my hopes were disappointed, for the first report from my detective was that Morgan Scraggs, having got himself involved in a peculiarly disreputable scandal, had hurriedly left the country. As a last resource, then, I called upon Scraggs himself, but, as I had anticipated, all my approaches were baffled by that wicked old man. Scraggs was very sorry, very sorry indeed, but he had Mr George Stewart's positive instructions to give no information, and his duty to his own clients must always have the first place in his consideration, and so on. I was bowed out.

So the matter stood, and after prolonged inquiries I was obliged to inform Mrs Stewart that nothing could be made of it in the meantime, and that the only course was to watch and wait. Several months elapsed without any fresh light, save a single detail which came to my ears, and which I connected in my mind with the Stewart case. One night several of us were discussing different members of the profession, and the conversation turned upon John Scraggs. Each of us had different instances of his depravity to relate, and, amongst

others, Russel, who told how his father's grieve had come into some money, which passed into Scraggs's hands for investment. Alarmed by what he had subsequently heard about Scraggs, the grieve demanded back his money. Scraggs failed to remit it, and his explanations were quite unsatisfactory.

"I got a mandate to uplift it from him," continued Russel, "which I presented at his office. At first he tried to bully me, but when I showed myself firm, and talked of the police, he soon became humble and cringing, and spoke of his wife and family, and begged for time. I gave him three days, and assured him that if the money were not paid by twelve o'clock on the third day, I would put the matter in the hands of the police. I did not expect to see it, but, strange to say, the whole sum was paid down punctually at twelve on the day fixed. I wonder where he got the money; I daresay he stole it from somebody else, but wherever he got it I was glad to see it."

"And when did this happen?" I inquired.

"Happen!—let me see. It must have been about the end of July 1890."

"And what was the amount?"

"Fifteen hundred pounds."

III.

One day shortly afterwards I received the following note :—

“ALBANY STREET, 5th July 1895.

“DEAR SIR,—I understand you have some interest in the affairs of Mrs Stewart, Pitt Street, and as she seems to have no friends, I think it right to let you know that she is suffering from a severe attack of typhoid fever. It would be very desirable that she should be attended by a professional nurse.—Yours truly,
“JOHN SWANSON, M.D.”

I at once called to make inquiries for Mrs Stewart, and I ordered a trained nurse to be got to attend her, on my responsibility. The illness was a very alarming one, and my constant inquiries seldom met with a very favourable report. I met Dr Swanson several times, and at one of these interviews he remarked that the illness was a very peculiar one, and that in the feverish excitement the patient seemed to be affected with certain hallucinations, which might be explained by one who knew something of her past life. It appeared that in her wanderings she was constantly

watching some one who was ascending a hill, followed by another at a certain interval behind, and at last apparently the man behind pushed the one in front over some cliff or precipice. Another peculiarity of the disease was that the patient was constantly working with her hands upon the counterpane, as though she had a pencil in them and were drawing something.

The story which Mrs Stewart wailed forth in her wanderings, in a half-musical chant, was somewhat as follows:—

“There he is, my beautiful, upon the heather; see the brown birds rise around him: how he strides, stalwart, mounting up along the valley by the stream! Oh, soon he will be beside his Mary—my beloved! But who is yon away behind him, far below, creeping onwards, ever after him—the dark man! I like him not. Surely somewhere, somewhere I have seen him heretofore. Now, my brave George gains the shoulder of the ridge. Soon he will descend beside his Mary by the pleasant lake. But nay, why stays my beautiful, why turns he aside? Alas! he would gain yon lofty hill-top to survey the pleasant prospect. I must wait me yet a while, wait me by the waters, ere my beloved is beside me, and the rugged stranger ever follows—the

dark man! I like him not. Now my bold George stands upon the summit, the summit of the mighty mountain—see the white birds rise around him, the white birds from the stones! Now he gazes o'er the fertile lowlands, now he counts the hill-tops in the sunshine. And the rugged stranger creepeth nearer—the dark man! I like him not. But see, my own George turneth! Nay, a moment he will linger, he will wander to the edge, and gaze down into the darkness, the gloomy darkness of the gorge! And the rugged stranger creepeth nearer, ever nearer—the dark man! I like him not. Now my sweet George gazeth o'er the dreadful dizzy edge deep down into the darkness, where the sunlight never searcheth. And the rugged stranger creepeth nearer. My God! it is the lawyer—the ghastly, grimy lawyer! Close, close behind he crawleth. He riseth! George! George! he will throw you in the gulf.” Then there was a piercing scream as the poor sufferer threw herself forward in a wild paroxysm of convulsive sobs. When the fit was past, she would resume the same story at the beginning, and so she would go on repeating it scores and scores of times, until complete exhaustion and collapse brought an hour or two of comparative repose.

Mrs Stewart had a Blenheim spaniel, which

was much about her room, and this animal, disconsolate, I suppose, over his mistress's neglect, was in the way of indulging at times in a series of plaintive howls. Whenever this howling commenced, it seemed to arrest the attention of the invalid, and to stay the movement of the picture which was passing before her mind. Her eyes would remain steadily fixed for a moment or two. Then she would glance down upon the counterpane, over which her fingers began to move rapidly, as though she were sketching something. As long as the howling lasted, this went on. Now she would look up as to the mental picture, and then down again to the sketch upon the counterpane. But the moment the dog ceased to howl, the movement of the hands ceased, the eyes became fixed, the mental picture seemed to begin once more to move, and the dolorous chant was resumed.

I visited Mrs Stewart several times, almost daily in fact, and still the same thing went on. For some time there was no change for better or worse in the condition of the patient. On one of these visits it occurred to me to make an experiment, which I deemed could do no harm at all events. When the dog began to howl, I placed a portfolio, with

paper, on the counterpane of the bed, and slipped a pencil in between the patient's fingers. Then I found that my surmise was correct : she was really drawing, or trying to draw something. Unfortunately, however, I could never get a satisfactory sketch, as the dog always ceased howling before much progress had been made ; and the moment the dog was silent, the pencil at once slipped from the fingers, and the raving was resumed. I could discern the rudiments of a human figure and the outline of a hillside, but nothing more in the inchoate sketch. It was a curious thing altogether, this intimate association between the howling of the dog and the act of sketching. I can offer no explanation. One may perhaps conjecture that either the howling of the dog awakened some train of associations which stayed the progress of the dream, or that the physiological action of the peculiar sound on the brain arrested the movement of the mental picture. One suggestion is perhaps as likely as the other, and both are too vague to merit the title of explanations.

It occurred to me that if I could make the dog continue howling for some time without intermission I might get a more satisfactory result. But how was this to be done ? Flagel-

lation was out of the question, for that would create a disturbance in the room, which might be injurious to the patient; and besides, I was sure that the landlady and the nurse, who were fond of the spaniel, and who could not be expected to appreciate my enthusiasm, would interfere and stop the castigation. Fortune however favoured me, for one day I found that the poor doggy was making a sad disturbance. Some turpentine had accidentally been spilt over it, and this had caused sharp pain, which was aggravated by a foolish attempt to relieve it by applying cold water. The poor brute was howling piteously. I at once had the portfolio and pencil brought, and the drawing began. Luckily for me the dog's discomfort was prolonged, and it continued to howl or whimper until the sketch was completed. It was not a finished drawing, but it was a bold, free, and very distinct sketch of a lithe youth, with clearly-marked features, climbing up a rugged hillside, whilst a good way below him a dark figure was discernible crouching among the stones. I took the picture home with me.

That evening I happened to have a call from my friend Peter Shand, a young Bohemian from Glasgow, who at that time was just beginning to make his mark as a painter of

interiors. The conversation turned upon sleep-walking, and he told me a curious story of an artist friend of his who, whilst in a state of somnambulism, had made a fairly good sketch of a lady whom he had not met for several years. Of course this tale reminded me of Mrs Stewart's drawing, and, without giving names or exact particulars, I mentioned that I had myself got hold of a drawing made in somewhat similar circumstances. Shand was anxious to see it, so I went upstairs and brought it down. "Bless my soul," he exclaimed, as I laid it on the table before him, "that's George Stewart!"

I now became very anxious to secure a sketch taken at the supreme moment when, in the dreamer's eye, the dark figure which had hitherto lurked behind stole up close to the man he had been following. But this was not easy to secure, as I did not venture to suggest a fresh application of turpentine to the dog. I was the more anxious about the matter as Mrs Stewart was now showing distinct signs of recovery, and the raving fits were becoming intermittent.

One day when I was in the sick-room Mrs Macpherson, the landlady, happened to enter with a bowl of some nourishment. I

noticed that her face was bandaged and much swollen.

"Dear me!" I exclaimed, "I'm afraid you've got the toothache." I did not hear the reply, for it was drowned by a series of prolonged and dismal howls from the dog, which had been lying quietly on the rug by the fireplace.

"Bless me!" said I, "what's set him off now?"

"Oh, it's your speaking about that!" replied Mrs Macpherson, touching her face. "The very mention of that word always sets him a-howling. It's a trick his mistress taught him, poor dear!"

"How very odd! let me try it again. How's oor toothache, Prinny?"

A series of dismal howls was my reward.

I felt that I had solved the problem. Luckily the very next day an opportunity occurred. Mrs Stewart had one of her raving fits when I was calling, the nurse was resting, and I sent the landlady who was on duty out of the room on some pretence. I let the dream go on until the closing scene was reached. Then I placed the portfolio upon the counterpane, and the pencil between the fingers.

"How's oor toothache, Prinny?"

The response was a dismal howl. I made the dog keep on howling by a series of running comments upon the dental malady.

“Toothache, Prinny! Toothache, toothache! Ah, the poor little doggie!—is its toothache very sore?”

I am sure that no stranger who heard the dismal howls which these remarks occasioned, and saw the expression of concentrated anguish on the animal's face, would for one moment have doubted that he was suffering the most excruciating agony. I kept the concert up in this way until I saw that the sketch was complete. Then, full of excitement, I lifted the portfolio from the bed. Yes, there was George Stewart looking away down into the dark abyss, and there, a yard behind him, with hand outstretched as though to hurl him over, crouched the hateful form of John Scraggs.

Two years before this I had been counsel for Mr Merrilees, tenant of some shootings near Comrie, who had been foolish enough to hit a poacher. The case was settled, a tender having been accepted whereby the poacher got a small sum and his costs. But John Scraggs, who was solicitor for the poacher, lodged an exorbitant account, and a good many of the items were disallowed on taxation. Well, one

day, very shortly after I got the sketch from Mrs Stewart, I happened to be destroying some old papers, and among them were some odds and ends of Court papers which my clerk had neglected to return at the time to the solicitors who had instructed me. One of these happened to be a copy of Scraggs's account in the poaching case, and as I glanced at it to see what it was, the word "Comrie" caught my eye. Under date 14th September 1890 there was the following entry: "Attendance precognoscing William Fraser and John Leishman at Comrie, and Peter M'Gregor at Invergeldie, engaged all day." Scraggs was at Comrie then, and at Invergeldie on 14th September 1890, the very day of George Stewart's disappearance.

This discovery sent me back again to the sketches. The scenes were very slightly elaborated, the chief attention and detail being devoted to the human figures; but from the first I had been troubled by a strange idea that these scenes were not altogether new to me. The mention of the word Invergeldie recalled to me associations of the past, and seemed to confirm this surmise.

Years before I had shot the Invergeldie moors, six miles north of Comrie; there,

indeed, I had killed my first ptarmigan. Above the lodge the ground rises very sharply to a sort of plateau, broken by a rugged valley, down which courses a troubled stream. Ascending by this valley one soon reaches the watershed, and then a descent of a few miles leads to Loch Tay. But before reaching the watershed one passes on the right Ben Chonzie, one of the loftiest hills in Perthshire. As one has already climbed more than one thousand feet from the valley at Invergeldie, it is not a very long pull to reach the summit of Ben Chonzie, and a magnificent prospect, which reaches from North Berwick Law on the east to the hills of Arran on the west, and extends northwards over the whole Grampian range, is the reward. The summit of Ben Chonzie is a long ridge, and on the extreme east of this ridge one looks down an almost precipitous descent right into Glen Turret, a dark gorge hundreds of feet below, where, even at midsummer, the sun hardly ever reaches.

Such was the scene which Mrs Stewart's sketch now recalled to me. The association of this spot with the near presence of John Scraggs on the very day of George Stewart's disappearance was beyond measure strange ;

and brooding over the matter, I resolved to revisit the scene, in the vague hope of finding out something that would throw light upon George Stewart's fate.

IV.

Mrs Stewart was now very much better. The raving had altogether ceased, and Dr Swanson assured me that all that was now needed for recovery was careful nursing and complete repose. Relieved of anxiety on this score, and the Court having now risen for the long vacation, I determined to take a run up to Comrie. The waters, I heard, were in good order; and if I did not catch George Stewart I might land something else. It was late in the evening when I reached Comrie, and I betook myself at once to the best inn in the town, a fine old hostelry, which for intelligible reasons shall be nameless. The house was very full, but I was shown a clean, comfortable attic bedroom, and after supper and a smoke I bethought me of bed. Whether at home or on the move, I always look very carefully to see if there is anybody below my bed before I get into it. Now I think I hear some cynical

pragmatist—I have often so heard him before—inquire, as though the question exploded my habit altogether: “But what would you do if you did find somebody beneath your bed?” I don’t know. What wouldst thou do, O cynical pragmatist, if a mad dog were to emerge from under the seat of the railway compartment when the express was at top speed? For my part, I prefer to leave the solution of such problems to the inspiration of the supreme moment, when it comes, as please Providence it never may. But it is a dark heresy to pretend that the careful scrutiny will reward the anxious searcher only when there does happen to be somebody beneath the bed—a heresy as dark as the creed which teaches that righteousness has no higher reward than escape from doom. No! Whether in that mysterious hour when somebody *is* found beneath the bed, this habit will profit me, lies hidden in the dark bosom of the future. But meanwhile this scrutiny beneath the bed is to me a perennial source of blessing, as it nightly smooths my pillow with the comfortable assurance that there is *nobody* beneath the bed.

Well, on this occasion, being in a strange hotel, I did not neglect the rule, and the first glance sent cold shivers through me. There

was certainly a large dark object underneath the bed. The shivers, I say, were cold, but they were not *very* cold, for, after all, the dark object did not look much like a human figure. It might be only a trunk or a bundle of old carpets. So I placed the candle upon the floor, looked about for a minute, as though I had dropped a pin, and then peeped cautiously again beneath the bed. No, it was certainly not a burglar : the contour was far too regular ; so, taking courage and looking closer, I satisfied myself that it was only a long deal chest. I was much relieved, and being sleepy, and by no means of a curious disposition, I did not care to explore further ; so I put out my light and went to bed.

I had not a good night. It is true I fell asleep at once, but I woke up an hour or two later with a sort of impression that there had been some loud noise in the room. I raised myself on my elbow and listened intently for a minute or two, with my heart in my mouth, but I heard nothing, and my head soon sank on the pillow again. But I did not sleep. The room was clean and tidy ; there was nothing against it on that score. But it was one of those distressful chambers where the furniture has the infernal habit of making all sorts of creak-

ings and other mysterious noises at night. I tried to reason with myself. I had bolted the door, fastened the window, and looked beneath the bed and into the wardrobe. No precaution had been neglected. The vent, too, was narrow, and there was no cupboard in the room. I was perfectly secure, so I reasoned, but all the time I was only humbugging myself. It was not the dread of anything that locks and bolts will stop that was making me feel so uncomfortable. But I would not allow this even to myself, and I wanted some mundane excuse for my disquiet. I found it. Yes, there was that chest underneath the bed. I had not looked to see what it contained. At first this idea about the chest was a pretext—an excuse for uneasiness on another score,—but gradually I worked myself up until it became a reality. What prudent man would ever go to bed with a large chest beneath his bed unexplored? After the fate of Troy this was flying in the very face of Providence!

I grew desperately anxious to find out what was in that box. Two or three times I turned myself upon the bed: at least half-a-score of times I turned my pillow. But it was of no use. I could not sleep. At last I could stand it no longer. I must find out what was in that

box. I sprang up and lighted the candle. Yes, there was the box, and a big box it was. I could not open it where it lay, and I had some difficulty in getting it out from below the bed, for, although it did not seem to be heavy, it was very unwieldy. I had brought a fishing gaff with me, however, and with the aid of this I managed to drag the box out in front of the bed. It was a plain deal box, about six feet by two, and eighteen inches high. I tried to raise the lid, but it did not yield, and to my chagrin I found that it was securely padlocked. I am not the man, however, to stick at a trifle. I got the poker and inserted it below the clasp which the padlock secured. Then I put one foot on the box and bent the poker up with all my might. There was a report like a pistol-shot as the clasp snapped. I wonder it did not alarm the household.

I lifted the lid and saw a covering of old newspapers loosely folded over something. These I pulled away, and there lay before me in the bottom of the box a human skeleton! I must have given a sudden start back at the sight, for my elbow knocked over the candle, and "in an instant all was dark." All, too, was still but for the beating of my heart, which was thumping like a piston. The match-box!

Where was that? On the dressing-table. I made a detour to avoid the box and knocked my foot against the wardrobe. It must have been a sharp knock, for I found afterwards that my foot had bled a good deal, but at the moment I hardly felt the pain. After knocking over several articles, which fell on the floor with a hideous clatter, I at last got hold of the match-box, and my heart almost stopped, for at first it seemed that the box was empty. But no, I was mistaken. There were three matches in it. I tried to strike one. It burnt blue for a moment, without illuminating the room, and then went out. Missed fire! Two—a blue glare again, and then darkness as before. Somebody seemed to blow them out just when I had struck them. Three—my last match! My hand shook as I pressed it against the box. Again there was a momentary blue glare, and again I was alone with the darkness, the skeleton, and—! Somebody had certainly blown it out this time! I thought I felt a cold breath on my face. Shivering with horror, I groped towards the door. But I was pulled up by something catching the corner of my night-shirt. There was no longer room for disguises. With a wild scream I turned sharp round, to find that I was free again. Then I rushed to

the door. But the bolt was a difficult one, and my fingers were numb and useless. A dozen times I tried it, but to no purpose; I could not draw the bolt. Now I thought I heard somebody breathing hard behind me, and a cold breath seemed to fall upon my neck. Ceasing to try to draw the bolt, I simply yelled with horror, and beat frantically with my hands against the panels of the door.

It was not long ere, to my infinite relief, I heard sounds of commotion outside. There were responsive screams from several quarters, and the sound of voices and hurrying feet in the passages. It was some minutes, however, before any attempt was made to relieve me, for as every visitor in the inn had begun shouting or screaming, it was some time before the hotel people could discover where was the "real original" distress. At last, however, outside, attention was directed to my dooꝛ, and a voice demanded, "What's the matter there?"

"Murder, murder," I shouted; "stave in the door, there's ghastly, grimy murder in this room."

I was leaning against the door now, my hands spread out over the panels, but suddenly I found myself lying on my back on the floor.

Some heavy person had flung himself against the door with all his might, and the shock had knocked me over on my back ; but still the bolt held. I did not attempt to rise, but sat still on the floor, whilst several more furious assaults were made upon the door, all to no purpose. At last there was a sound as of consultation, then a pause for a minute or two, and then " One, two, three," a tremendous crash, and the light streamed into the room. The bolt still held, but the hinges had given way. They had smashed in the door with the mangle roller. A dozen pale eager faces peered into the room. There were six male guests, three ladies in deplorable *déshabille*, the landlord, and several hotel servants. I can hardly have looked a dignified object ; I fear I scarcely did credit to the bar of Scotland as I sat there on the floor frantically hugging my knees as I recognised the presence of ladies.

" What's the matter ? " was the first question that assailed my ears from a dozen mouths.

" I—er—really don't know—ah ! " I began, for I was getting confused, and I hardly knew myself what was the matter. I got no further, for I was interrupted by a storm of imprecations from every male in the party. My foot, as I have stated, had been bleeding, but this

was hardly adequate to account for the unanimity and heartiness with which the whole company attributed to me a sanguinary character. The host was particularly vehement.

"Ye bluidy bletherin' lawyer body, ruinin' an honest man's hoose," he was proceeding, but by this time I had gathered myself together.

"Look you here, you hoary old iniquity," I began, "look in that box, sir ; look in that box, gentlemen ; ladies, though this is an unmarried man's room, I invite you to come and look in that box. I appeal to you all whether the discovery of such an enormity by an innocent stranger under his very bed does not amply justify this disturbance?"

The discovery of the skeleton provoked an extraordinary reaction in my favour. The general indignation was at once diverted from my head to that of mine host. "It was monstrous that a respectable and peaceable gentleman should be disturbed by finding a ghastly outrage like that beneath his very bed." "They would leave the house, they would, first thing in the morning." "This whole matter would be exposed in the London Society papers ; it would ruin the hotel," and so on. The innkeeper was quite overwhelmed, and protested his shame and regret, though he

was too honest to pretend that he did not know before what was in the box. It appeared that a local doctor was in the way of letting his house in autumn and taking up his quarters in the hotel. The skeleton was his property, and not caring to leave it to the care of his holiday tenants he brought it with him to the hotel. His bedroom was small and his bed a very low one, so he prevailed upon the landlord to allow him to stow away the box in the adjoining room, which happened to be the chamber that fell to me. Hence the offence! To-night the doctor had been called away to attend a patient at a distance, so the host had to bear the whole weight of the general abuse for the outrage that had been committed upon me, and the consequent disturbance of the repose of his guests. But gradually the clamour died away, as one by one the angry visitors betook themselves to their respective rooms. The trembling host offered to have the skeleton carried out to the stable. I told him he might carry it to Khiva if he pleased, but I was not going to sleep in that room; so I dressed and went downstairs to the coffee-room, where I dozed on a sofa until the servants came to sweep out the room in the morning. Then I went for a walk up to the Devil's Mill.

At half-past eight I returned to the inn for breakfast. My good-mornings to the ladies were a trifle embarrassing; but we got over that, and I found that the incident of the night before was the all-absorbing subject of conversation. The general indignation, however, had now cooled down. Of course everybody, especially in addressing me, expressed disapproval of the surreptitious intrusion of such an unwelcome visitor into a stranger's bedroom, but I was painfully conscious that, now that daylight had supervened, there was an inclination on the part of several of the company to treat the incident with unbecoming levity.

After breakfast a card was handed me, and I was informed that the doctor requested an interview with me in the billiard-room. I found, of course, that he desired to tender his humble apologies for the disturbance of the previous night. At first I daresay I was exceedingly stiff, but the apologist was so contrite, and so obviously vexed, that my ill-humour soon thawed, and I entered into some general conversation with him. The doctor was a bright, pleasant little man, of middle age, evidently somewhat of an enthusiast in medical and other matters, but with a touch of

affectation and pedantry in his manner which showed itself in the use of the now almost obsolete practice of Latin quotations in general conversation. Whilst talking with the doctor, it occurred to me that there was nobody more likely than this bustling, well-informed man to give me information in the matter that brought me to Comrie. So, after leading the conversation up to the subject of the weather in the district during the winter, I casually inquired if he had ever known of anybody being lost upon the hills.

“ ‘ Infandum, Regina, jubes renovare dolorem ’—that unlucky skeleton, the *corpus delicti* itself, was found upon a hill half a dozen miles from here, last spring. How it came there, or how long it had lain, I can’t tell, for there was nothing to identify it by, and nobody from the district has gone amissing for many years back.”

“ Indeed ! and where was it found ? ”

“ You know Ben Chonzie ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, it was found among the rocks on the Glen Turret side, fifty or sixty yards below the brow of the summit. Nobody claimed it, and I persuaded the police to allow me to keep it. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ.*”

This was intensely interesting, and I questioned the doctor minutely, but his information hardly went further. The bones had been found by a shepherd, bleaching among the stones. A keyless gold watch, without inscription, was hanging in the hollow of the chest, the chain having caught on one of the ribs. There was a ring on one finger, and some silver was found lying near the left thigh-bone. There were, too, some fragments of cloth and a number of buttons lying about. From these circumstances, the authorities and the doctors who made the *post-mortem* concluded that death must have taken place several years before the discovery of the remains. There was a fracture in the skull sufficient to account for death, and several of the finger-joints and one shoulder were dislocated. I got from the doctor the name of the shepherd who discovered the remains, and I ascertained that he was still at Invergeldie.

Early in the day I hired a trap, and drove up to Invergeldie. I found that the shepherd I wanted was out; but this did not disappoint me much, for I had rather a fancy to examine the hill-top alone and find out what I could for myself. In less than an hour I was on the summit, and I made at once for the eastern

edge. Without difficulty I found the place I had thought of as being recalled to my memory by Mrs Stewart's sketch ; but, before taking the sketch from my pocket, I looked carefully to see if there were any signs by which I could positively identify the scene. I fixed on three things in view as characteristic features not to be readily mistaken. On the left there was a projecting rock, with a singular resemblance to a bear stretching out its neck in the act of rising. In the foreground, just in front of me, there was a large round boulder, flat on the top, with a smaller boulder of a similar shape on the top of it again, very like a variety of bread loaf which used to be much in favour, and may be so still, though I seldom see it. On the right, just below the edge of the precipice, there was a curious projecting fragment of rock, like a bullock's horn, pointing downwards. Having fixed upon these as the most distinctive landmarks, I took out my pocket-book and unfolded the sketch. Yes, there could be no doubt about it. There, very slightly drawn, but as accurately outlined and relatively placed as though they had been photographed, were the bear, the bread loaf, and the bullock's horn. The dreamer's eye must have taken in the scene from the very

spot where I was standing. I next went forward, and very carefully examined the edge of the descent beneath. It was not quite a sheer precipice, but anybody thrown violently over would hardly have been arrested before descending eighty or ninety feet, and would certainly have been terribly bruised and broken amongst the boulders and projecting rocks. I tried to judge as accurately as I could the spot where the descent of a person falling over from the place on the edge indicated in the sketch would be arrested, and, having settled upon the place I deemed the most likely, I made a detour, and scrambled down and along until I reached it. The ground was thickly strewn with loose stones of all shapes and sizes, and at first I could see nothing to indicate whether my surmise was correct or not. But at last, on a stone much larger than any of the others, I noticed something that fully confirmed my conjecture. A good deal washed away by the rain, but still plainly discernible, there was the tracing of a cross upon the stone, made apparently with sheep-dip or some other viscous substance. Doubtless some of the shepherds had made this mark on the spot where the remains were found, either out of sentimental feeling or to be able to identify the place again

in case of further inquiries. I turned over many of the stones, but for long I could find nothing to indicate that on this spot human remains had so lately seen corruption. At last, however, my search was rewarded by several small discoveries. In quick succession I came upon a metal button, on which the name of a Glasgow tailor was still legible, a rusty brace buckle, a tarnished sleeve-link, and a threepenny bit. I could find nothing more, though I turned over every stone within four or five yards of the spot. There were, indeed, two stones which I was unable to turn,—the large one with the cross upon it, and another beside it. Between these two stones there was an opening of about half an inch wide, down which, as I thought, something might have slipped. At last, by using a long splinter-shaped stone as a lever, I managed with much difficulty to displace the smaller of the two stones. There was a flat brown object, which at first I thought was only some crushed moss, lying between them. I lifted it carefully, and found that it was, or once had been, a leather pocket-book. The stitching was all completely rotted away, and I was afraid to handle the thing lest it should collapse into shapeless pulp or mould in my hands. Very carefully I placed

it in a large envelope I happened to have in my pocket, and as there was now nothing to be made of further search about the spot, I wended my way down the hill.

With admirable fortitude I curbed my impatience until I had returned to Edinburgh, and was able to make the examination of the pocket-book under the most favourable circumstances. I found that it had a large inner pocket on each side, and on the one side there were, besides, one or two smaller pockets, as for stamps or cards. Between the outer folds, but not in either pocket, there was a letter in an envelope. In one of the smaller pockets there were the remains of some postage-stamps, in another there were a number of calling-cards, on some of which the name George Stewart was still clearly legible. The third small pocket contained only a return half railway ticket apparently from Stirling to Glasgow. In one of the larger pockets there was a Bank of England five-pound note, six Clydesdale Bank one-pound notes, all in fair condition, a blank Clydesdale Bank cheque, and a photograph, apparently of a lady, and with the name of an Exeter photographer still legible on the back of it. In the other larger pocket there was a game licence, still fairly legible, some court

plaster, an illegible newspaper cutting, and a prescription, on which the invocation and the word “bismuth” alone were legible.

But by far the most important discovery for my purposes was the letter between the outer folds, and unfortunately this had suffered much from the action of water. The envelope was unstamped, and appeared not to have passed through the post, and never to have been closed. The address was quite illegible. The letter itself was a sheet of blue notepaper, written upon three pages. It appeared to have been written by Stewart, but never despatched. Probably he wished to consult young Marshall before sending it. With infinite pains I managed to gather the gist of a portion of the contents. My reading of this portion was as follows, the words and letters in Roman characters alone being legible, those in italics being supplied by conjecture :—

“——— Street, Glasgow,
Sept. 1890.

“ Mr *John Scraggs*.

“ *Sir*,—I am *astonished to find that* the document you handed *me* is not what *I* asked for and *what* you represented *it to be*—the original declaration of my marriage with Miss

Havelant, but *only* a copy of *the* same, and *even* that *copy* a garbled one. This is *only* in a piece with *your* *whole* conduct in *the* matter, and

“As to the £1500
 unless three days will
 be reported to the procurator-fiscal my
 ultimatum.

“I am,

“Your obedient Servant,

“George Stewart.”

This letter was extremely vexatious and disappointing. It was clear to me that the declaration of marriage was referred to, and that that document was still in Scraggs's hands, but there was not a legible word in the letter that served to identify the document. John Scraggs seemed still to be master of the situation. But I was determined to try a fall with him. I have frankly indicated in this narrative that I don't like skeletons under my bed, or anything of that kind. With the ghostly I am *nie zu Haus*; but before real flesh and blood I don't quail. I cannot boast as some have boasted, that I fear neither man nor devil. But bar the devil, and I am on!

V.

I knew that Scraggs worked at his office late at night, and it occurred to me that at night, when he was alone, was the most favourable season for the full operation of those terrors with which I purposed to assail him. Accordingly, one evening between nine and ten o'clock, I betook myself to his office in Young Street. An old crone who kept the rooms admitted me, and I knocked at once at the door of Scraggs's room. Invited to "Come in," I opened the door, and stepped into the chamber. Scraggs was seated at his desk, busy poring over some papers. On seeing me, he started up and invited me to be seated, with an air of interested expectancy. I fancy that Scraggs was not altogether unaccustomed to visits of this kind, under cover of the night, from people of a social position much superior to that of the ordinary run of his clients, who had got themselves into scrapes which they were ashamed to explain to their own solicitors. No class of clients could be more welcome to Scraggs. They were generally substantial, and he might fleece them as he pleased, unrestrained by any dread of the pruning pen of the taxing-master.

"Well, what can I do for you to-night?" inquired Scraggs, when I was seated.

"I called," I began very deliberately, "about a matter of some delicacy, in which I am interested."

"Indeed, I hope I can be of some service to you," replied Mr Scraggs, and his eye glistened with eager expectancy.

"I have no doubt you can, sir, for the matter is one with which you are thoroughly conversant."

"It concerns a lady?"

"Yes, a lady whose case you fully understand."

For a moment, but only for a moment, Scraggs looked puzzled, but his theory was quickly formed. I was under the impression, he thought, that some female who was black-mailing me was in his hands. This was a mistake, but to John Scraggs such a mistake was a trifling detail.

"Yes, yes, of course; there's a woman at the root of every trouble," he replied, with a familiar leer in his face. "I quite understand the matter,—a very disagreeable case, no doubt, but possibly—I won't, I can't say more—*possibly* an extra-judicial settlement may be arranged which will save the exposure."

“‘Exposure’ is hardly the word, Mr Scraggs; it means something more than that.”

“Well, well, of course,—a professional man’s reputation is his bread and butter, we all know that.”

“This is not quite a matter of bread and butter, Mr Scraggs; it’s much more likely to be a matter of bread and water.”

“Dear me, dear me!” and Mr Scraggs looked puzzled again.

“I don’t wonder, Mr Scraggs,” I continued, “that you desire an extra-judicial settlement. You’ll be a lucky man if you get one.”

“Me?”

“Yes, *you*, Mr Scraggs, and you’ll better understand me when I tell you that I’ve called with reference to the affairs of Mr George Stewart.”

At the words the light faded from Scraggs’s eyes, his jaw fell, and his countenance darkened.

“Oh, if that be so,” he replied in his surliest tones, “I am afraid you may spare yourself the trouble. I thought I had given you clearly to understand that I have Mr Stewart’s imperative instructions to give no information.”

“But I speak, sir, on behalf of one who has an imperative right to demand information whatever may be your instructions.”

"And who may that be?"

"Mrs George Stewart."

"I don't know any such person."

"Well, I won't quarrel about names. You know Miss Havelant?"

"No, I don't know Miss Havelant; and Miss Havelant has nothing to do with me."

"It would have been fortunate for herself, I daresay, if she had never had anything to do with you; but you have in your possession a deed embodying a declaration of marriage between her and Mr George Stewart, and you'll hand that deed over to me before I leave the room."

"Declaration of marriage!" exclaimed Scraggs; "I never heard of such a deed."

"I am not going to discuss the matter with you, Mr Scraggs. I demand the deed."

"Demand the devil!" said Mr Scraggs, throwing himself back in his chair with insolent defiance, and kicking violently against the under side of the table.

"No, Mr Scraggs, not in the meantime. For the present I'm content to allow that gentleman to appear by his procurator. Come, hand me the deed."

"I'll hand you to the door," replied Scraggs with extreme insolence. "A pretty fellow,

meddling in affairs with which you have no concern. Mr Stewart was quite right to warn me against you."

"Ah, come, this is something new; when did this happen?"

"The very last time I saw Mr Stewart."

"Indeed, on the very summit of Ben Chonzie."

I had fixed him with my eye, and at the sound of the words "Ben Chonzie" every particle of colour left his face, his whole frame quivered, a curious gulping motion began in his throat, which soon became so violent that I thought he was going to choke. His features grew livid, and his eyes were almost closed. I have never seen a more repulsive sight. At last, however, and though it appeared long, I suppose the convulsions had not lasted more than a few seconds, he pulled himself together with a tremendous gulp, and in a tone of surly defiance demanded, "What do you mean, sir?"

"Look here, Scraggs," I replied, rising to my feet and planting myself deliberately in front of him, "I may as well tell you at once that the game is up. I know all about it—all about the fifteen hundred you appropriated—all about the garbled copy of the marriage declaration which you tried to palm

off as the original—all about your visit to Comrie, and what happened on Ben Chonzie.”

“Happened on Ben Chonzie! What do you mean?—what do you mean?—what do you mean?” shrieked Scraggs in fierce excitement, as he leant forward in his chair and ground his teeth, as though he were about to spring at me. I had been drawing from my pocket Mrs Stewart’s sketch of the scene on the hillside, and I now brought it sharply straight in Scraggs’s view.

“That’s what I mean.”

Scraggs gazed for an instant at the sketch, a look of horror crossed his face, which was hidden in a moment by his throwing his hands over his eyes, as he fell back shuddering in his chair. For a moment or two he lay trembling, shivering, and twisting himself as though some one were teasing him with a hot iron; and then, at last, he broke forth into a flood of bitter weeping. I daresay these were the first tears the old scoundrel had shed since he got his last licking at school forty years before.

I let him cry for a minute or two, and then I began again with harsh deliberation. “Will you go to the police office, and surrender your-

self? or will you wait, and be apprehended here?"

At these words the sobbing ceased, and he threw himself forward again in his chair, his hands outstretched in piteous entreaty.

"For God's sake have mercy upon me. For God's sake don't give me up. I'll do anything—anything you want. Have pity on my poor wife."

(Scraggs then had a wife. I had not thought of that, although, by the way, I knew he had a son. It has often puzzled me. There seems to be no depth of depravity but what some woman will be found to go down to it. I have often thought it proof of the finitude of the Devil, that he has never made a man so bad that no woman could be found to take him.)

"Well," I replied, "first of all, hand me that deed."

"And will you hold your tongue if I do?" inquired Scraggs, with something of his old cunning returning. I recognised the danger of any parleying, lest the effects of the first horror should wear off, and he should reflect upon the improbability of there being any legal evidence against him.

"Look here, sir," I replied sharply and

decisively, "hand me that deed, and agree to quit the country in three days—or the jail to-night!"

"Three days! Give me three weeks to wind up here."

"No; only three days. Come, I won't haggle. Shall I call a policeman?" and I made a move towards the door.

"Stay, stay," he shrieked; "I'll agree to anything. See, here, *here's* the deed," and he opened a charter-box. The deed was in my hands; but, mindful of George Stewart's experience, I looked at it carefully, to satisfy myself it was the original. I had read it through, and was scrutinising the signatures, when suddenly I received a shock that would have knocked me over had my back not been against the table, and I was sensible of violent constriction at the throat. Scraggs had thrown himself upon me with the fierceness of a wild cat. I was pinned in the most extraordinary manner, for he had passed his hands under my arm-pits, and seized me by the throat. My shoulders were thus held in a vice, and my arms so foreshortened that I could not deal an effective blow. The small of my back was pinned against the table, I was bent back nearly off my feet, and Scraggs's

own feet were firmly planted against a large chest, which gave him enormous purchase. His face, too, was buried in my chest, so that I could not hit him in front. I made one or two desperate efforts to free my shoulders, but the man possessed extraordinary strength, and held me like a vice. There was a ruler on the table, unfortunately a small one, but it was the only weapon at hand. I seized it, and began hammering, with all the reach I could command, on the back of my assailant's head. But the terrible compression at my throat was maintained. I knew it was a matter between us of simple lasting. No man could stand these blows upon the head for many seconds, but my respiration was all but suspended. My head began to swim, the room seemed to whirl round me: then things grew darker and darker. All was black for a moment: then there were bright shooting lights, red and blue, and I heard the distant sound as of mocking laughter. But of the outer world two facts of consciousness still remained—that feeling of terrible compression at the throat, and the persistent sense of the necessity of maintaining that pump-handle motion with the hand. I was like a towering partridge. Every sportsman

knows a towering bird. It goes away often as if it had not been touched by the shot. But gradually it separates from the covey, and its flight becomes groggy for a moment; then it steadies itself, and flies higher and higher, until at last it is flying almost perpendicularly upwards; and then suddenly the flight collapses, and the bird falls as dead as Julius Cæsar. It has been shot through the brain; and as effusion takes place, it gradually loses consciousness, until nothing remains but the sense of the absolute necessity of continuing the flight and not descending to the ground.

So I, choked by John Scraggs, lost consciousness of all else save the absolute necessity of maintaining that constant pumping motion with the hand. I was at sea, and I had cut my throat whilst shaving in a storm, but we had sprung a leak, and I could not leave the pumps, else the ship would sink. I was at dinner, and there was a bone in my throat, but we were singing Auld Lang Syne, and I must not offend against the national traditions by letting go my neighbour's hand. I was rowing in a boat-race, and a wasp was stinging my throat, but it was a desperate finish, and I must not break

my stroke to brush away the wasp. I was playing Rugby football, as it was played when I was a boy, and in a maul in goal a man was trying to scrag me. If I did not wrest the ball from him I should be choked off presently. I gathered myself, and gave one or two desperate wrenches. The ball came. The scragger's arm was loosed. I fell upon the ground and touched down amidst a hurricane of applause from the bystanders. After this I remembered nothing save a vague sense of delightful dreaming, until I awoke as from sleep. It was some time ere I realised that I was lying on the floor in John Scraggs's office. It seemed ages ago since that interview with him, but the clock over the chimney-piece in front of me made it only 10.5. I struggled to my feet, feeling weak and giddy. At first I did not see anything of Scraggs, but as my senses quickened I was conscious of the sound of heavy breathing in the room, and, looking under the table, I saw a dark object lying. I lit a paper at the gas-jet and held it under the table. Scraggs lay there, his head face downwards—doubtless just as I had touched it down. He was breathing heavily, and bleeding pretty freely from one ear. I tottered out to the street, but at the door I

remembered that I had forgotten the coveted deed, and I returned to get it. But Scraggs had now recovered so far, and crawled out on to the rug. I looked on the table, but the deed was not there, and for a moment I was puzzled. But—no; of course I had dropped it on the floor. I went round to pick it up, but meanwhile Scraggs had risen, and noticing the deed he made a movement to get it. I was before him, however; but as I raised it in my hand he tried to clutch hold of it. We glared at each other for a moment,—my last look of John Scraggs,—and my strength seemed to come again at the sight, for I struck him a tremendous blow between the eyes, that sent him clattering amongst the charter-boxes in the corner of the room.

I was far from well for some days, and suffered a good deal from bleeding in the throat, which kept me in the house for a week. My first impulse was to report the matter to the authorities; but the more I thought of it the less I liked the idea. Except the assault upon myself, I could not substantiate any charge against Scraggs; and as for that, a professional man's reputation, like that of a lady, always suffers from being

mixed up in a scandal, in however innocent or even praiseworthy a part. A day or two afterwards, however, I was relieved of all questionings on this matter by a paragraph in the evening papers announcing the mysterious disappearance of a solicitor, leaving heavy defalcations behind him, and that solicitor—as I learned the same evening from my friend Rodger, who called to inquire for me—was, as I had suspected, no other than John Scraggs. I never heard of Scraggs again, but I have little doubt of his identity with a man—of whom I heard from an Australian practitioner—who, for a year or two, along with his son, hung about the Courts at Sydney, doing the lowest class of business, until at last he got five years for fraud. He served his time, and died a few months after his release in an almshouse. The son—Morgan, I doubt not—is now a *lifer* for horse-stealing.

I had no difficulty in satisfying the advisers of the Stewart family of the identity of George Stewart's remains. The skeleton now lies in the Glasgow Necropolis, to disturb the repose of travellers no more. There was a little more difficulty about the marriage; but after a threat of showing fight, the Stewart family were

obliged to give way, and Mrs Stewart took half of her husband's fortune. This was the more fortunate, as her recovery from the fever, though tedious, was most satisfactory. The fire seemed to have cleansed her brain, for when the fever left her, all the morbid eccentricity she displayed before had quite disappeared.

My tale began in the Parliament House, Edinburgh. There let it take end; but not in the law-room. In the corridor rather, where, Medusa-like, sits the collector of the Advocates' Widows' Fund; and as I wend my way to his desk to pay that barbarous impost, the "age-tax on marriage," kind reader, pray that longer love and a kinder fate may await my bride, when cried in kirk and wed by parson, than befell her "irregular marriage."

A GLASGOW MYSTERY.

I.

UPON Friday, 24th December 184—, Walter Rutherford was placed at the bar of Glasgow Winter Circuit Court upon the charge of the murder of Eliza Lamont.

The circumstances of the supposed crime were remarkable, and provoked much public interest. Rutherford, who was the son of a well-to-do Berwickshire farmer, had attended law classes in Glasgow University, and had nearly concluded the term of his apprenticeship in a solicitor's office. Miss Lamont, his supposed victim, was the head of a small but thriving millinery establishment in Stirling Road, and lodged with Mr and Mrs Curle, a respectable couple, in Grafton Street hard by. Curle had been a small farmer in the parish in Berwick-

shire to which Rutherford belonged, but having lost his money through the folly of a scapegrace, his only son, he was obliged to give up his farm and come to Glasgow, where he did a small commission business in potatoes and other farm produce. To eke out their means the Curles gladly received as a boarder Miss Lamont, whose father was a distant relation of Mrs Curle. Rutherford was in the habit of frequently looking in upon the Curles, whom he had known in his boyhood. At their house he met Miss Lamont, who was a remarkably handsome and taking girl of about twenty-four—a couple of years older than himself—and an attachment soon sprang up between them. Rutherford was not then in a position to marry, but he was anxious that an engagement between himself and Miss Lamont should be recognised by his parents, and that she should be received by them as his intended wife. But the Rutherfords aspired at something higher for their son than a Glasgow milliner, and absolutely refused to countenance the suggestion. The Curles were humble friends of the Rutherfords, and Miss Lamont was a humble relative of the Curles, so the thing was not to be thought of. A coolness accordingly sprang up between Rutherford and

his family. This misunderstanding reached a head when, on the occasion of a visit of Rutherford to his home, his mother, without the warrant which a knowledge of the facts would have given her, made some disparaging remarks with reference to the character of "the milliner girl." Rutherford quitted his father's house in great indignation, vowing never to return until he brought back "the milliner girl" to be received as his wife. This happened upon 17th October 184—, and about half-past nine o'clock on the evening of the following day Eliza Lamont was found with her throat cut, and in a dying condition, upon Glasgow Green, near the corner where the Court Buildings now stand. Rutherford, it was proved, had called for her at the Curles' at nine o'clock. He was seen in her company by two acquaintances a few minutes afterwards in Argyle Street, and he was identified by several persons as having been seen hurrying away in an excited state along Clyde Street immediately after screams had been heard from the spot where the body was found a few moments later. A motive was all that was required to make the case against him complete, and that was abundantly supplied when his lodgings were searched by the

police. In order to make the matter clear, it is necessary here to say something of the previous history of Eliza Lamont.

Eliza was the daughter of the grieve at the home farm on the L. estates in Dumfriesshire. Her mother had been maid to the lady of the manor, whom she accompanied from England at the time of the latter's marriage. Eliza in her early years was much in the society of the daughters of the great house, who were of an age with herself, and she thus acquired a certain refinement of manner superior to her station in life. Young E. of S., in Argyllshire, was a relative and a frequent visitor of the laird's family, and being about Eliza's own age he had known her from infancy. Unhappily a clandestine attachment sprang up between them when both were still in their teens, and the result was unwedded motherhood. Horrified at such a scandal almost within his own household, the laird, as soon as he learned Eliza's condition, insisted upon her removal from the district. She was sent to Glasgow, and so carefully were things managed that the true state of matters never leaked out in Dumfriesshire. Of course E. was communicated with, and called upon to make redress for the wrong he had done.

This he was very ready to do, for, though thoughtless and much spoilt, he was not a bad-hearted lad ; indeed, but for the strong influence of his mother, supported as she was in this matter by the laird of L., he would probably have married Eliza. As it was, an arrangement was made for the upbringing of the infant apart altogether from its mother, and a sum in excess of what the law would have allowed her was paid over to Eliza herself. Upon her recovery she was apprenticed to a milliner, and being naturally quick and already skilled in many departments of the work, she soon mastered the details of the business. Upon the conclusion of an apprenticeship of three years she was able, with the funds handed over to her by E., to start a business of her own ; and she had already conducted it with success for about a year when she first met Walter Rutherford. Such was the story of Eliza Lamont, and it need scarcely be wondered that the sad blemish in her past was carefully concealed from her lover. But it came to his ears, and within twenty - four hours thereafter Eliza Lamont was dead, and Rutherford a prisoner charged with murder.

Rutherford was apprenticed to the firm

of B. & N., writers, Glasgow, who happened to be the agents for E. of S. On the morning following the rupture with his family, Rutherford appeared at the office and went about his work as usual. About half-past eleven he was rung up by N., who had been perusing the firm's letters for the morning. N. handed several letters to Rutherford, with instructions regarding them. Amongst others was a letter from E. with an accompanying deed. "Just write an acknowledgment of that," said N., "and say that we have put the discharge aside in a secure place. You had better put it with the other S. papers that are in the safe, as for obvious reasons it was not recorded."

When he had got all his orders, Rutherford returned to the clerks' room, laid the papers on his desk, and proceeded to attend to the matters entrusted to him. By-and-by he came to E.'s letter. It was in the following terms :—

"S., 17th October 1841.

"DEAR SIRs, — When going through my papers the other day, I came upon the enclosed deed connected with that unlucky business in Dumfriesshire. It is not a pleasant

thing for a man who is going to be married to have such a document kicking about the house, so I send it to you for custody.—Yours truly,

“J. N. E.

“Messrs B. & N., writers, Glasgow.”

On glancing through this letter, Rutherford recollected N.'s remark about the “obvious reasons” for not recording the deed; and accordingly he picked up the deed itself, with a little curiosity to see what all this mystery was about. It was backed up, “Discharge by Eliza Lamont and another in favour of J. N. E. of S. 1836. Messrs B. & N., writers.” The name of the granter of course quickened Rutherford's interest, but it no ways startled him—there was many an Eliza Lamont doubtless in the world—and he unfolded the deed without excitement or alarm. But the first line fairly took his breath away. “I, Eliza Lamont, milliner, Glasgow, daughter of Peter Lamont, land-steward at L., in the county of Dumfries—” It was some moments before Rutherford could read further; then he glanced hurriedly at the signatures, and finally he read the deed slowly and deliberately through from beginning to end. It was a discharge by Eliza Lamont and her father as

her administrator in favour of E. of S., whereby in consideration of payment of the sum of £2000 she released him from all claims in respect of seduction and of breach of promise of marriage, which alleged promise of marriage it was declared by accepting the deed E. should not be held as admitting. After perusing the deed, Rutherford immediately left the office without mentioning to his fellow-clerks the cause of his going. The latter were busy at the time, and took no particular notice of his movements; but, as he passed through the doorway, one of them happening to look up noticed the livid colour of his face, and remarked to his neighbour—"Rutherford's looking awfully bad—he must have had a tiff with Miss Lamont, surely." Rutherford did not return to the office; but in a couple of hours a porter arrived with a note to the effect that he was indisposed and would not be back that day.

So far the case for the prosecution tallied in all respects with the case for the defence. Thereafter the case for the prosecution was as follows: On leaving his office Rutherford repaired to Miss Lamont's shop—a place he had never before visited—and saw her for a few minutes in her private room. Next he

betook himself to his own lodgings in St George's Road, where he remained until about half-past eight, leaving his dinner untasted. About nine o'clock he called, as he was frequently in the habit of doing, for Eliza, who had her hat and jacket already on, and who appeared to be waiting for him. He accompanied her up Argyle Street, and along to the corner of the Green. There, as it was alleged, he murdered her by stabbing her in the throat. Then, having flung the knife or other instrument of his crime into the river, he hurried home and took to his bed, where he was found by the officers who came to apprehend him about two o'clock in the morning. The deed of discharge was found lying in a corner of the room, where it had evidently been angrily tossed aside.

Every one of the allegations contained in the foregoing narrative of the case for the Crown, except the actual commission of the crime and the disposal of the weapon, was proved beyond contradiction by direct evidence; and as not more than three or four minutes could have elapsed between the moment when Rutherford left the girl and the moment when her body was found on the Green, the case for the Crown appeared overwhelming.

The prisoner's own story of what had occurred was as follows : Upon leaving the office he hurried along, overcome with rage and shame, to Miss Lamont's establishment, and sought an interview with her in her private room. There he confronted her with the tokens of her shame, and demanded an explanation. None of course was forthcoming, and he left her with bitter reproaches, vowing never to see her again. He then repaired to his lodgings, and sent a message to the office that he was unable to return there that day. Shortly afterwards he received by the hands of a small errand-boy a pencil note from Miss Lamont, begging him to accord her one last interview, and asking him to come as usual to Grafton Street that evening. After some hesitation, Rutherford, deeming it hardly humane to refuse to accede to such a request, determined to go. Accordingly he repaired at the usual hour to Grafton Street, where Miss Lamont met him in the hall. She accompanied him to the Green, piteously beseeching his forgiveness. Rutherford, however, was decided and obstinate, and at last, fearing that her excitement and protestations might create a scene and collect a crowd, he determined to leave her. As he hurried away

she repeatedly called upon him to stop, and uttered heartrending screams, but he pressed on the quicker and hastened home. On reaching his lodgings he committed to the flames every letter and memento of Miss Lamont, including the note received that afternoon. The truth of one of the details of the foregoing narrative was borne out by the evidence of Miss Lamont's assistants, who said that although she went about her work as usual on the afternoon of the 18th, they were struck by the fact that having written a note, instead of sending some one out with it, she went out herself, and handed it to a lad who was loitering on the other side of the street. The lad was not traced, but Rutherford's landlady confirmed the story that a letter was brought to his lodgings that day by a street boy. But all this did not go far to exculpate Rutherford. It might be that the interview had not been of his seeking, but the violent death of Miss Lamont had to be accounted for, and the only possible alternative to the case for the prosecution was the theory of suicide. There was a strong motive for such an act, no doubt, and the medical evidence was to the effect that the injuries might have been self-inflicted. But to this theory there was an apparently fatal

objection. No weapon or instrument by which the wound could have been inflicted was found near the body, although a diligent search was made at the time, and as the ground was quite open for a number of yards round the spot there was no way of reconciling this circumstance with the theory of suicide. Had a knife or any other sharp instrument been found beside the body, the case for the Crown, strong even then, might have been broken down; but in the absence of any such discovery defence seemed hopeless. There was, indeed, one singular fact in connection with this aspect of the case. A carving-knife, which usually lay in a drawer in Miss Lamont's room, and which the servant had washed and put away there an hour before Rutherford called in the evening, was missed on the day after Miss Lamont's death. Had Rutherford been in the room when he called it might readily have been supposed that he had picked up and secreted the carving-knife, and taken it with him to commit the crime; but Mr and Mrs Curle and the servant were all positive that on the night in question Rutherford came no farther than the doorway of the house. This incident, however, although doubtless singular, was not enough to save Rutherford. Miss

Lamont might have taken the knife herself with the intention of putting it to some dreadful purpose ; but if she cut her own throat with it, why was it not found beside her by those who were on the spot ere the breath had left her body ?

S., the counsel for the prisoner, was then a man of about ten years' standing at the bar, and with but a slender practice. He had been only junior counsel in the case, but at the eleventh hour he was deprived of the services of his senior, R., then in large practice, under circumstances which created much comment and animadversion at the time. R. was a very high Churchman, and when it became clear that the trial would run into Christmas Day, he returned his papers. It was too late to secure another senior, and the whole burden and responsibility thus devolved upon S. It was not therefore to be wondered that he felt peculiar anxiety about the case, and this anxiety was increased by the strong impression which the demeanour and protestations of the prisoner made upon his own mind. In the lad's presence he found it morally impossible to believe him guilty, but on considering the matter quietly over he was unable to form any reasonable theory of the case consistent with his innocence.

The trial began at about three o'clock in the afternoon of Friday, 24th December 1841, all the other business of the Circuit Court having been disposed of. The Bench was occupied by the Lord Justice-Clerk—Lord Mackenzie, the other judge on the Circuit, having been obliged to leave Glasgow the previous day on account of indisposition. Mr Mark Napier, Advocate-Depute, conducted the prosecution. The case for the Crown closed about half-past six, and the Court then adjourned till the following morning at ten o'clock, when it would devolve upon S. to present his defence. The court-room had been crowded to suffocation all afternoon, and what with the bad air, the heat, excitement, and anxiety, S. felt on the rising of the Court in no fit state for dinner. Declining, on the score of need of exercise, Mr Napier's offer of a seat in his cab back to the hotel, S. left the Court alone, and instead of going to the hotel he wended his way to a quiet café in Port Dundas Road, where, sad and solitary, he comforted himself with a frugal repast of tea and bread and butter. About half-past seven he sallied forth again, determined to take the benefit of a long walk in the clear cool air of the evening, which was a remarkably fine one.

Turning west up Sauchiehall Street, he wandered along past where the fashionable squares now stand, and on round the site of the University buildings. Then inclining southwards he gained the Dumbarton Road, and turned to the left to make his way back to the city. It was about half-past nine when he reached the bridge across the Kelvin. All was silent around, and he paused for a moment upon the bridge to look about him. The night was magnificent, clear and frosty. There was no moon, but S. had never seen a finer display of the starry host. Suddenly he remembered that it was Christmas eve. Engrossed all the way with his care and anxiety about his case, he had been hitherto quite oblivious of that fact. S. was not a very religious man, and at no time was he of a very emotional nature; but on this occasion his nerves were highly strung, and all the hallowed associations of the hour suddenly crowding in upon his memory, he was very much overcome, and leaned forward for support against the parapet of the bridge. For several minutes he remained thus, resting his temples upon the cold coping-stone of the wall. He was roused at last by the sound of singing in the distance. It was some children doubtless returning from

a Christmas treat; but the only part of the chant which S. distinctly heard were the words—"An angel sent from heaven appeared." "Would," groaned S., looking up with emotion more akin to prayer than any he had experienced for many a year,—“would that some such messenger would appear to me this night, and guide me to save that poor lad's life.” He had hardly uttered the words when he observed a falling star of extraordinary brightness in the eastern sky.

Solaced somewhat by his solitary ramble, but still sad and oppressed, S. returned to the hotel. Although all the other work of the Circuit was finished, and although, too, the next day was Christmas, such was the interest excited by the case of Rutherford that a great many of the juniors had waited to hear the trial out. When S. reached the hotel he would gladly have slunk off to bed, but conscious of his neglect that evening of the socialities of Circuit, and unwilling to transgress further, he repaired to the advocate-depute's room, where the members of the bar were all gathered up jesting, talking, and drinking, just as juniors upon Circuit do now, and have done from time immemorial. Of course S. was rallied about his absence from

the dinner-table, and all sorts of quizzical suggestions were made as to what he had been about. These he took all in good part, and he joined for a few minutes in the general current of the conversation, but his anxiety soon again overcame him. He relapsed into silence, and his thoughts wandered away to the pale, eager face which the morrow would see doomed to a felon's death. It was midnight, and the company gathered round the depute's fire were still laughing and talking. Napier was recounting certain reminiscences of Walter Scott's demeanour at the clerk's table in the Second Division, greatly to the interest of the juniors, who remembered Walter only as a figure upon the streets in their school-boy days. S., who had not uttered a single word for more than half an hour, was still thinking sadly over the details of his case, and vainly endeavouring to frame a feasible theory for the defence, when, happening to glance round, he saw a young woman standing near the door and looking towards him in an attitude of expectation.

"Hulloa!" he exclaimed, starting, "did any of you fellows ring?"

Everybody turned and looked towards the door.

II.

The door was shut, as it had been since the last exit of the waiter, half an hour before, and nobody saw anything to account for S.'s sudden remark. S. himself was confused and surprised, for the woman had disappeared, where or how he could not exactly explain, the moment he had called attention to her presence.

The company turned to S. for an explanation, but he only rubbed his eyes and looked foolish.

"Eh, old man," said Mr Napier, who was the first to speak, "you've been dosing, have you? Well, it's no wonder; I daresay you're tired."

"Oh no, I've not been asleep, I assure you!" replied S. "I never was more wide awake in my life."

Everybody laughed, and S. felt rather nettled.

"I was not asleep," he repeated slowly and deliberately, and raising his voice, "I saw a woman just now standing there by the door."

The company exchanged glances of mingled surprise and amusement, and the state of S.'s tumbler was carefully scrutinised.

"Well, where has she gone to?" inquired B. eagerly. "Behind the curtain or up the chimney?" for I assure you nobody has opened the door this last half-hour."

"Turn her out, turn her out, old boy, and let's have a look at her," said several of the jokers.

"She has gone, she has disappeared," replied B., "and I must go and follow her."

"Oh, come, my good fellow," said Mr Napier, who was growing a trifle uneasy, "I see you're very tired; I think you'd better be off to bed at once."

B. made no reply, but rose from his seat and walked towards the door of the room.

"Will some of you fellows see that he gets all right to his room?" whispered Mr Napier as B. opened the door; and in obedience to the kindly request B. and M. rose and followed B. out of the room.

"Well, that is most extraordinary," said Mr Napier when they had gone. "I have known B. for many years, and I never saw him that way before."

"He hasn't had much here at any rate," said G., who was assisting Mr Napier at the Circut. "I think he has only had one whisky since he came in."

"He wasn't at dinner, I noticed," remarked L. "I suppose he has been out on the loose."

"Well," said Mr Napier, "it's rather a risky prank for a man to play in the middle of a trial such as that of Rutherford. Upon my word, I hope he will be all right in the morning."

Meanwhile S. had descended the stair to the hall, eluding B. and M. who sought him in his bedroom. At the foot of the stair he paused for a moment. All was silent, save the distant murmur of voices from the depute's room, and the loud breathing of the hall-porter, who was fast asleep. S. glanced in the direction of the latter sound, and to his surprise he noticed that the front door of the hotel stood open. Stepping softly across the hall so as not to disturb the sleeper, S. reached the door and slipped out into the street. On issuing from the hotel door S. observed the female who had disturbed the symposium standing on the far side of the street, and apparently waiting upon some one she expected. She had neither bonnet nor cloak. S. crossed the street in her direction, but ere he reached her she turned away and moved down the street, looking back repeatedly to see if he were following her.

Impelled by a strange fascination, S. followed the girl at a few paces' distance, through

several streets, till at last they reached Grafton Street, and there the girl turned aside into a house. S. paused upon the pavement whilst she opened the door with a latch-key and entered the house, leaving the door ajar; then he followed to the doorway, where he paused and hesitated. But his curiosity, or the fascination which was upon him, overcame his scruples, and he stepped into the lobby, closed the door behind him, and followed the girl, who had apparently been waiting for him in the lobby, into a room which opened off it on the left hand.

The situation in which S. found himself was a somewhat compromising one. He was alone in a parlour bedroom with a tall, prepossessing young woman, apparently not very far up in the twenties. Having satisfied himself that nobody else was present, he seated himself on a sofa and took stock of the apartment and its tenant, for such she seemed. The lady herself, once S. was seated in her room, took not the slightest notice of her visitor, and seemed indeed unconscious of his presence. Neither of them spoke, but S.'s eyes followed every movement of the lady with an interest which grew somewhat more than kindly. What struck him most, perhaps, was the ex-

ceeding sadness of her expression, so dissonant with the youthful freshness and vigour of her face and figure. Having arranged several things in her wardrobe, and written a hurried note, she put on a bonnet and jacket, and then slowly crossed the room to a cupboard near the door, which she opened, after a moment's hesitation. From the cupboard she took a large carving-knife, which she carried to the gas-jet above the mantelpiece and carefully examined, running her fingers along the edge with a ghastly smile, half horror, half contempt, which made S. shudder where he sat. Next she stooped and placed the knife-blade between the fender and the hearth-stone. Then she put her foot firmly upon the fender, and stooping down, bent the handle of the knife sharply up until the blade snapped off close to the hilt. Having broken the knife, she next proceeded to dispose of the handle, which she did by putting her hand up the chimney and dropping the handle over into the waste at the back of the grate. Then raising the fender, she picked up the blade, and after again carefully examining it she placed it in her muff which lay on the sofa beside S. She had scarcely done so, when loud rapping was heard at the

outer door. In an instant the sound dispelled the glamour which the movements of the mysterious female had cast over S.'s mind. He was himself again, cool, clear, and critical, but overwhelmed with horror at the position in which he now found himself. Doubtless that knocking announced the arrival of some stranger—it might be the girl's lover, or her husband for that matter of it, it might be the police, it might be anybody. In any case, S. felt that he was compromised—ruined. He, a respectable member of the bar, approaching to middle life, and charged with the sole responsibility for the defence in an important murder trial, to be found after midnight in a bedroom in a strange house alone with a young female. These thoughts crowded through his mind ere the knocker had ceased to rattle; a cold perspiration broke over his body, and seizing his hat, without one further thought or look for the woman who had done him the cruel injury of wiling him there alone, he rushed out of the room and tried to gain the street. But the hall was dark, and in his hurry he could not find the check handle of the outer door. Now there were footsteps behind him in the lobby, and speechless and breathless he sank into a recess opposite the

door of the room from which he had issued, and watched his opportunity for escape. It was his hostess who had followed him into the hall, and she immediately advanced to the outer door. S. thought he heard a man's voice, but from the place where he was concealed he was not able to see the front doorway. From the shutting of the door, however, and the subsequent silence, he gathered that the lady had taken her departure with her visitor, and the moment the coast seemed clear he stole out of his retreat, opened the front door, and was again free. On gaining the street, S.'s first impulse was to hasten home with a thankful heart, as one who had escaped from the pit of destruction; but curiosity prompted him to make an effort to get some explanation of the strange adventure. Glancing along the pavement, he saw a man and a woman whom he took to be the couple who had issued from the same door as himself. "Well," thought he, "I shall see what they are after at all events. Let me see—I don't know what street this is, but this house is No. —,¹ and I'll see the street name at the corner." S. followed the couple, who appeared to be engaged in an animated and rather

¹ For obvious reasons the number is not given.

expostulatory conversation, keeping at a distance of about fifty yards behind them. At the corner of the street he looked for the name, which with some little difficulty he deciphered in the uncertain light. "Grafton Street! and No. — too. Good heavens! I've been in the very house where that poor girl lived. My God! what does all this mean?"

With a curiosity which was now highly quickened, S. followed the man and woman across Argyle Street, and then down by several cross streets towards the river. His creepiness increased as he neared the scene of the murder, by the corner of the Green. The night had now changed. It was very dark, and the rain was falling heavily. The lady had put up her umbrella, but S. noticed that the man neither offered to carry it nor shared its shelter. And now they seemed to have reached the exact spot, so far as S. could judge, where the murder must have taken place, and there they paused. Crouching upon the ground, at some forty yards' distance, and straining his eyes to make out their forms in the darkness, S. could clearly distinguish the low passionate note of entreaty in the woman's voice, and the cold repellent tone of her companion. But suddenly the

conversation ceased, and then all at once arose loud screams as of a woman in agony. All S.'s eeriness was gone in a moment. There was no mistaking the clear human ring of that woman's voice, and S. rushed like a tiger to the rescue. But the man was gone. The woman was kneeling on the grass, her back to S., and her body rocking to and fro with convulsive sobs. Her open umbrella lay beside her upon the ground. But she had ceased to scream, and S. paused, uncertain and embarrassed. Now she seemed to be fumbling with her muff, and as she withdrew her hand S. saw something gleaming in it, and recalled with horror the scene in the room in Grafton Street. He was now, however, less than ten paces distant from the girl, and he made a rush to save her. But no, he was mistaken; for ere his hand could reach her shoulder the blade was tossed aside, and fell with a clatter amongst the ribs of the open umbrella. Overcome with kindly pity, S. did not stay his hand, but laid it gently upon the poor girl's trembling shoulder. It was too late, for as he touched her, her head sank back against his knees, a hoarse gurgle rose from her throat, and the bright arterial blood spurted over S.'s hand.

The next thing of which S. was distinctly conscious was a sense of intense discomfort and uneasy jolting, such as he had not experienced since he went to church as a child in a farm cart. It was some minutes before he could altogether collect himself, but at length, by the combined exercise of his senses of hearing, touch, and sight, he was able accurately to appreciate his position. The conclusion which he arrived at, and which was quite correct, was that he was lying upon his back in a wheelbarrow which was certainly never intended as a vehicle for the conveyance of a man of his size, and was being hurled along the street by a stalwart Glasgow policeman. The moment S. realised his situation he attempted to rise, but from his constrained position, with the small of his back sunk low in the barrow, he found it difficult to do so, and accordingly he appealed to the policeman.

"I say, my man, you had better stop at once, and let me out of this."

"Git along o' ye," replied the policeman, "wu'll be at the offish the noo, where wu'll gie ye free quarters, ma man."

"Oh, come, my good fellow, none of your impertinence," said S., struggling up to a sitting position; "you are under a complete

mistake." With dignity, "I am a member of the bar—an advocate."

"An a'vocate! Is that a' ye are, man? They're maistly dooks or markises we fins at this 'oor o' the nicht, when it's no' the Prince Consort hissel'. But here's the offish."

With these words the policeman set down the handles of the barrow with a jerk which shook every bone in S.'s body. S. at once rose, and was turning away, but the policeman's hand was upon his shoulder, and another policeman, who had been following, coming up, S. found himself being impelled by that gentle but resistless force, which policemen so well understand, towards the door of the office. At the foot of the steps, however, he made a determined stand.

"Look here, you men," said he with assumed calm, "hands off, I'll walk quietly into the office if required to do so; but if you attempt to run me in, in this ignominious manner, there'll be broken heads going."

S. was a powerful man, and the quiet determination in his tone, so unusual in a drunk and incapable, took the police so much aback that they loosed their hold and allowed S. to enter the office in front of them. They were kept waiting for a minute or two in the lobby

whilst another case was being disposed of, and then S. was ushered into the presence of the Inspector, whom he at once recognised as one of the witnesses in the Rutherford Case.

"What's this?" inquired the Inspector.

"Drunk and incapable," replied the policeman who had followed behind the barrow. "Heerd a wench skirling nigh the corner o' the Green, and gangs oor an' fin's this here gintleman sae drunk he wasna fit tae speak or tae stan'."

"Well," said the Inspector, "he appears to have come round a bit pretty quick. But you'd better lock him up now."

"Look here, Inspector Wilson," said S., who was now quite himself, and thoroughly realised the gravity of the situation, "I am no more drunk than you or these policemen are. I was not feeling well, so I went out for a stroll, and in crossing the Green I had a faintish turn, when these two ruffians pounced upon me and jogged me along here in a barrow that has loosened every bone in my body. I insist upon an apology and instant liberation."

The Inspector was surprised to hear himself thus addressed by name, and in such a cool and collected manner, by a drunk and in-

capable, and he looked scrutinisingly at S., whom he had not hitherto recognised.

"And who are you, sir, pray?"

"You know perfectly well who I am, sir. I am Mr S., advocate, of Edinburgh, and you saw and spoke to me to-day in Court."

"Oh, Mr S., to be sure, I beg your pardon a thousand times; of course the men have made a mistake," exclaimed the Inspector, who, like all Glasgow police officials, had a wholesome respect for everybody connected with the Supreme Court.

The policemen were dismissed with an admonition to be more careful in future, and S. was about to take his own departure when a new idea occurred to him.

"Oh, by the way, Inspector," he inquired, "can you tell me who is living in the Curles' house, No. — Grafton Street, now?"

"Nobody, sir," replied the Inspector; "the Curles have left, although their furniture is still there, and I've got the keys myself."

"That's very strange," said S. "I was passing that way, and I saw a light in the house to-night."

"Oh no, that's impossible, sir."

"Yes, but I assure you it is so," replied S. "And what's more, I saw a man and a

woman leave the door not more than an hour ago."

"You are sure it was No. —, ground-floor door?"

"Yes, certain."

"Then I must see to that at once. I hope it will not be too much to ask you to accompany me just to make sure there's been no mistake."

"Oh, I'll be very glad to go," said S., "though I am quite sure it was that house."

"Well, sir, if you'll just wait a moment until I get some one to take my place here, and a constable to accompany us. But you've hurt your hand."

"No; have I though?" replied S., raising his left hand, which, sure enough, was stained with blood, as were also the wristband and shirt sleeve.

"I must have knocked it against something or other; it's of no consequence," he continued, with a shudder, as he recalled the scene upon the Green. The Inspector brought some water with which S. washed his hand, but no lesion of any kind was found to account for the blood-stains.

A few minutes later, S., the Inspector, and a constable sallied forth, and made their way to

Grafton Street. On the way S. strove diligently to impress the Inspector with the idea that the house was probably a haunt of thieves. The door was found locked, and on opening it and entering the lobby S. readily recognised the place as the scene of his adventure earlier in the evening. They first entered the kitchen to the right. Everything was in order, and the Inspector was confirmed in his supposition that S. was not so sober as he seemed, and had brought him on a fool's errand. However, they next stepped across the lobby to the room on the left. "Who's room was this?" inquired S., as he opened the door. "Oh, this was poor Miss Lamont's——" But the sentence was cut short, and the lantern almost dropped from the Inspector's hands, for the embers of a fire were still smouldering in the grate.

"Whew!" exclaimed the Inspector, when he had recovered from his surprise, "you're not so far mistaken, sir, after all. What can be the meaning of this? Anderson, you had better go at once for further assistance; I'll watch the door and see that nobody escapes."

S. was left for a minute or two alone in the room,—every corner, every piece of furniture of which he recognised,—and he seized the opportunity to take a crown-piece from his

pocket and slip it half under the grate. In a few minutes Anderson returned with three other constables, and a thorough search of the house was made, but nobody was found.

"Are there any coals in the house?" inquired S., when they were gathered in the lady's room after the search was completed.

"No, sir; why do you ask?" said the Inspector.

"Where did the materials for the fire come from?"

"That's very singular, as you say, sir; I didn't think of that," said the Inspector, and he went forward with his lantern and carefully inspected the fireplace. His quick eye detected the crown-piece, which he drew out from under the grate and carefully examined.

"You're not far wrong after all, sir. We must have out this grate, boys. There's swag here."

The grate was soon torn out, but, much to the Inspector's chagrin, no further booty was discovered.

"Here's something or other," he exclaimed, as he rummaged away at the back. "Bah! it's only an old knife-handle;" and he pitched it angrily upon the rug.

"That's sing'lar, tae," remarked one of the constables, picking up the handle. "We

seerched ivery corner o' the hoose for a carvin'-knife, an' that's a carvin'-knife hanel sure eneuch."

III.

It was past three o'clock when S. reached the hotel, and he did not spend more than three hours in bed. He was out betimes, and he was careful to secure the attendance at the Court of Inspector Wilson, one of the constables who searched the house, and the Curles, who were, fortunately, all Crown witnesses in the case.

Inspector Wilson was the first witness called for the defence, and a profound impression was made upon the Court when he proved the finding of the knife-handle in Miss Lamont's room—an impression which was intensified when the Curles identified it as, to the best of their belief, the handle of the missing carving-knife. One question which S. put to the Inspector provoked the animadversion of the Court.

"You were present, as you told us yesterday, when the body of the deceased was examined?"

"I was."

"Were the injuries such as, in your opinion, might have been self-inflicted by a stab with the point of an umbrella?" (Laughter in Court.)

"Eh! what's that, Mr S.?" inquired the Lord Justice-Clerk.

"By a self-inflicted stab with the point of an umbrella, my lord."

"We heard nothing of such a suggestion in the cross-examination of the Crown witnesses yesterday. Have you any medical evidence in support of this theory?"

"No, my lord."

"Well, I am not surprised. You cannot examine such a witness as this upon the point."

"The point is one, my lord, which I mean to press strongly upon the jury."

"As you please, Mr S., as to that, but I cannot allow this witness to be examined upon it. Anything more?"

"No, my lord."

"Then, witness, you may go."

On the conclusion of the evidence for the defence, Mr Napier rose to address the jury upon behalf of the prosecution. After stating the case for the Crown, and summing up in a formidable array the evidence by which it was supported, he went on to refer to the defence

which was suggested. There were, he said, two theories for the defence. The first theory was that Miss Lamont committed suicide with a carving-knife. Where was that knife? It appeared, no doubt, that the handle of such a knife had been found at No. — Grafton Street, and that might have gone to support the theory of suicide had the blade been found beside the body, but, unfortunately for this theory of the defence, nothing of the kind had taken place. Having disposed thus of the first theory, Mr Napier went on to the second. Upon this subject he said—“Another theory has been suggested by my learned friend more creditable to his ingenuity than to his estimate of your intelligence. This poor girl, it is suggested, may have put an end to herself by cutting her throat with the point of her umbrella. Gentlemen, were it not for the solemnity of this case, one could not refrain a smile at the grotesque simplicity of the suggestion. Suicide by means of an umbrella, even if physically possible, would be a thing unique in the annals of self-destruction. But, gentlemen, will you just for one moment consider the question seriously, if, indeed, it be capable of serious consideration? And first, I observe

that this theory is clearly an afterthought—no medical evidence was adduced in support of it, and no question bearing upon it was addressed to the medical witnesses for the Crown. But that is not all. The theory of suicide in such a manner, grossly improbable in any case, was completely disposed of by evidence elicited by my learned friend himself. In his zeal to cast doubt upon the evidence of prisoner's identity by showing that the night was dark and wet, he elicited from Mr Murray, who was first on the spot, and who picked up the umbrella, closed it, and handed it to the policeman, that the umbrella was open when the body was found. Now suicide with an umbrella would be, under the most favourable circumstances, a most difficult operation, but a more awkward weapon with which to attempt to cut one's throat than an open umbrella it is impossible to imagine. Just consider, gentlemen, what that theory would involve. Macer, hand me No. 11 of productions."

The macer handed Mr Napier Miss Lamont's umbrella, which was a production in the case.

"Now, gentlemen," continued Mr Napier, as he unbuttoned the elastic, "see what sort

of weapon for the purposes of self-destruction an open umbrella would be."

With these words he opened the umbrella, and from its folds the blade of a knife fell with a loud rattle upon the table. A low murmur—half shudder, half chuckle—ran round the Court, and then for a moment all was still.

A short consultation now took place between the Bench and the prosecutor. The blade and the handle were carefully compared. Then Mr Napier, in a few stumbling sentences, withdrew the case; and amidst a hurricane of applause Rutherford was formally acquitted.

Such are the chief details, so far as I have been able to collect and to verify them, of one of the most remarkable episodes in the criminal jurisprudence of Scotland. One singular fact alone remains to be recorded. Shortly after the trial, S. had a shred of his stained shirt-sleeve submitted for analysis to Professor Stewart Traill of Edinburgh University. The result was curious. The report, which is before me, is in these terms:—

"Having obtained a solution, I applied the usual blood-tests, in every case with affirmative results. I next made a careful inspection of a drop of the solution through the micro-

scope. The corpuscles were readily detected. They were of the oval shape, characteristic of birds, fishes, and reptiles; but in the absence of nuclei, and the presence of a depression in the centre, they resembled the corpuscles of human or mammal blood. The only animals having blood corpuscles answering to this description are those of the camel species. I therefore conclude that the stain which I have examined was that of the blood of a camel."

S. carefully preserved the remainder of the sleeve with what he was pleased to call the "ghost stain," and it now lies before me on the table as I write these lines.

THE MILNATHORT MURDER.

I.

It was a hundred years ago, and one fine morning in May about seven o'clock (people rose early in those days), Mr Peter Tod, writer and notary-public, Kinross, was busy shaving, when his domestic knocked at his bedroom door and informed him that Miss Beveridge was below and anxious to see him at once. Mr Tod was surprised, and, to tell the truth, just a little annoyed, for a staid old bachelor is not in the way of receiving calls before breakfast from middle-aged spinsters, and Kinross was just as fertile a centre of gossip then as it is at the present day.

But Miss Beveridge was a client of Mr Tod's, and doubtless some business of im-

portance brought her there at that unusual hour—some rascals, perhaps, had stolen her hens. Mr Tod finished his shave with leisurely precision,—he was never in an unreasonable hurry,—adjusted his neckcloth, donned his coat, and then descended to his business-room. But Miss Beveridge was not there, for, as the servant had been busy dusting out that room when Miss Beveridge arrived, she had shown the lady into the parlour, and so she now informed Mr Tod. The lawyer was provoked, for although he was not a woman-hater, he was a man with whom circumspectness in his relations with the fair sex was carried almost to the extent of eccentricity. So far as his own premises were concerned, these relations were always of a strictly business character, and for many years no female other than his elderly domestic had ever crossed the threshold of his parlour. But here now was Miss Beveridge, a lady of that age and position in life so dangerous to the reputation of a well-to-do elderly bachelor, not merely admitted to the parlour, but introduced to it with the breakfast set upon the table, and left for the last half-hour the witness and doubtless the attentive student of all his bachelor whims and

comforts. Mr Tod opened the parlour door with a sudden snap, but instead of finding Miss Beveridge, as he had expected, eye-glass in hand, studying the quality of the sugar or the pattern of the tea-cosy, he beheld her stretched upon a sofa which stood in a recess at the end of the room,—a good old-fashioned horse-hair sofa it was,—with a handkerchief spread over her face. This was worse and worse.

“Really, Miss Beveridge, what is the matter, I pray you?” began the lawyer in his very sharpest tones.

The lady started, looked about her in confusion—for doubtless she had been dosing—and then jumped up and made for Mr Tod.

“Oh, Mr Tod! oh, dear me! oh, my dear Mr Tod!” and then, fairly overcome and breaking into sobs, she grasped the lawyer’s shoulders.

Had Miss Beveridge been smitten with the plague, Mr Tod could not have started back with greater agility, and it was only by clutching him violently by the sleeve that Miss Beveridge saved herself from being cast upon the floor. As it was, she sank sobbing into an easy-chair that stood by the fireplace.

“Well, upon my word!” exclaimed the

lawyer with an acerbity quite unusual with him. "What is the meaning of this extraordinary conduct? Shall I send for a doctor?"

"Oh no, Mr Tod—forgive me, Mr Tod—please don't be angry—I am so upset—if you only knew what I have come through," gasped the poor lady.

"Well, well, for God's sake be composed, and try and explain yourself," said Mr Tod testily.

"Mr Tod," said the lady, rising slowly, and Mr Tod drew back nervously towards the door, expecting a second assault upon his person. But without moving from her place, and with a forced calm, though she was trembling all over, Miss Beveridge continued in a hoarse, gasping whisper, "I saw a man murdered before my eyes this morning."

"Ah!" said the lawyer, with professional interest—he was the local procurator-fiscal, or public prosecutor—"tell me about that; but sit down first. I can't listen to a word until you sit down."

Miss Beveridge sank back upon the easy-chair, and then Mr Tod, deeming himself now secure against any further violence, drew a chair to the table, and leaning forward, with his chin between his palms, he listened to Miss Beveridge's story.

Miss Beveridge, who was a spinster of a certain age, and with a comfortable competency, resided in an old two-storied house, which has long since disappeared, close to the old North Road, on the Glenfarg side of Milnathort, which was then a mere hamlet. The household consisted of Miss Beveridge, who was the only daughter of an old Dr Beveridge, who had practised in Kinross in the middle of the eighteenth century, and Jean, her faithful maid-of-all-work, who had been from time immemorial in the service of the doctor, and after his death in that of his daughter. The story which this lady now told Mr Tod, translated out of the gasping and ejaculatory form in which it was related to him, was as follows:—

About four o'clock that morning she had been awakened by the sound of wheels passing along the road, just under her bedroom window, followed immediately afterwards by a shout. She jumped up, and looking out of her window she saw a closed post-chaise drawn up about sixty or seventy yards from her door, in the Milnathort direction. A bare-headed, middle-aged gentleman, dressed in black, who had apparently dismounted from the conveyance, was running towards her door, closely followed by two other men—the one a slender,

gentlemanly-looking man, in grey morning clothes, the other a rough, sailor-looking character. The gentleman in black had almost reached the wicket-gate, three or four yards in front of Miss Beveridge's door, when the former of the two pursuers overtook him, and seizing him by the coat-tails, he at once brought him to the ground by a violent side twist. The poor man uttered a loud shriek as he fell, but he was hardly upon the ground ere his captor's fingers were at his throat. The third man had by this time come up, and he at once drew a knife from his waist, which he was apparently about to plunge into the prostrate man's breast. But the other, still holding the throat with one hand, motioned aside the weapon with the other, and then placing his knee upon his victim's chest, and applying both hands again to his throat, he proceeded to strangle him. Miss Beveridge saw no more, and the next thing she remembered was Jean bending over her and mopping her head with a wet sponge. Struggling to her feet, she rushed again to the window, but the men were gone, the carriage too had disappeared, not a vestige or trace remained of the horrible scene which she had just witnessed. Jean, who slept at the back of the house, had not, it appeared, heard the

sound of the passing conveyance, but she had been roused by the crash of the looking-glass which her mistress had upset in falling, and she had at once hurried in, to find Miss Beveridge insensible upon the floor.

"And how long did it take her to bring you round?" inquired Mr Tod.

"About four or five minutes, Jean says."

"And you looked out immediately and saw nothing whatever?"

"Yes, everything had disappeared."

"Ah, quite so," and then again, after a longish pause, "quite so."

Mr Tod, as has been stated, was procurator-fiscal, and although he had a strong suspicion that this improbable story was the result of some nightmare, or at most of some hysterical exaggeration of a drunken brawl, he could not allow such a circumstantial narrative to go unsifted. Accordingly he promised to come out to inspect the spot immediately after breakfast, and meanwhile he cautioned Miss Beveridge to mention the matter to no one.

"You may depend upon that, Mr Tod. I did not mention what I had seen even to Jean. The poor body would be afraid to bide in the house, so I put it on the cheese."

"On the what?"

“On the cheese. Oh, I beg pardon, I forgot to mention that I had toasted cheese for supper, which may account for my wakening so easily. You knew my Aunt Eliza, you’ll remember her? No! Well, she was married to an Englishman, and when I stayed with them at Preston we always used to have toasted cheese for supper, and I thought I would like to try——”

“Oh yes, I understand—that’ll do at present—time presses, you know,” and the lawyer made a decided motion towards the door.

“H’m!” murmured Mr Tod when he had dismissed his visitor; “these last details cut both ways; it’s not like a hysterical woman being so reticent and cautious; but toasted cheese for supper! in a Christian country!”

After breakfast Mr Tod walked up to Miss Beveridge’s, and, giving the pretext to Jean of having a new gateway made, he got Miss Beveridge out to show him the spot where the alleged occurrence had taken place. The road was hard and baked, and it was impossible to tell whether the wheel-marks were those of conveyances which had passed the previous night, or whether any vehicle had been that way since daybreak. At the place where the chaise was said to have stopped, it was im-

possible, from the number of rough stones upon the road, to verify that part of the story. Mr Tod looked in vain for any traces of a struggle at the place near the edge of the road which Miss Beveridge pointed out as the spot where the man had been thrown to the ground. He saw nothing, and he was just turning away when he fancied he noticed something glittering under a tuft of grass at the verge of the roadway.

"See, Miss Beveridge, is there nothing on the other side of the road? They may have rolled over that way."

Miss Beveridge went over to look, and the moment her back was turned Mr Tod stooped and picked up the shining article, which he slipped into his pocket. It was a gentleman's shoe-buckle, of the style usually worn at that period.

"Now, I must see Jean," said Mr Tod at last. "She'll be round at the back, I dare-say;" and he went round towards the back of the house.

"Are ye thaur, Jean?" he shouted, on reaching the back premises.

In a minute or two Jean appeared at the scullery door.

"Jean, wumman," began Mr Tod, "this is

an awfy bizness aboot the lassie Lawson;” and he mentioned the name of an “unfortunate” who had been to consult him the previous evening.

“Deed ay, sir, it’s jist shamefy; her puir mither’s like tae break her hert—the hissy!”

“She putts the blame on Jock Lowrie.”

“So A’ heerd, and A’ dinna wunner’t; he’s an ill loon, that Jock.”

“Ye’ll a seen them thegither?”

“Ay, twarry times.”

“That’s jist what A’ was gaun tae speer aboot,” said the lawyer. “Ye maun tell me a’ ye ken;” and he proceeded to take a brief precognition in the cause *Lawson v. Lowrie*, in which, as he knew very well, Jean was able to supply him with no assistance which could not have been rendered equally well by any man or woman in the parish of Orwell.

“The Missis is no’ lookin’ weel the day,” said the lawyer at last, making a turn as if to go.

“D’ye think no?” replied Jean, who had been all volubility upon the subject of Miss Lawson’s misfortune, but who at once became cautious when the subject of inquiry came nearer home.

“She’s no’ bin complainin’?”

"She's no' the complainin' kind."

There was no use beating about the bush further, so the lawyer went straight to the point.

"That must hae bin an awfy turn she had i' the nicht, puir body?"

"Oh, she tellt ye aboot that, did she?" replied Jean, whose respect for her mistress at once fell 50 per cent. "Young folks is aye indiscreet."

"Ou ay, she tellt me a' aboot it. Ye maun hae bin awfy skeered. Mind ye, it's a seriis biziness, onybody bein' haf an 'oor in a faintin'-fut."

"Haf an 'oor! wha said onything aboot haf an 'oor? She wasna aboon five minits."

"Ay, was that a'? but hoo d'ye ken that?"

"A' heered her fa', and A' run ben, and she cam' roon' to hersel' in aboot fower minits, or maybe five at maist."

"Puir body! And what did she dae when she cam' roon'?"

"She ran tae the winday, jist as if she war chokin' like."

"Ye didna hear onything afore she fa'd, onything that could maybe hae disturbed her like?"

"Naw, naethin' ava. A' heerd nought till

A' waukened wi' the lookin'-gless gaun bang. Man, it's a peety tae see't; that gless cost twa pun' ten jist fower year syne, cum Martinmas."

This was all the information that was to be got out of Jean, and having once more hailed Miss Beveridge, and cautioned her to mention the matter to no one, the lawyer went his way.

Mr Tod was now confirmed in his belief that the story of Miss Beveridge was the result of some nightmare or delusion. It was a most unlikely story to begin with, and no traces of a scuffle were discernible near the place indicated. The statement of Jean, too, made it clear that Miss Beveridge was not more than five minutes absent from the window, and nothing could be more improbable than that at one moment a man should be seen strangling another upon the public highway, and that just five minutes after all traces of victim and assassin should alike have disappeared from view. But there remained the shoe-buckle, and that detail was just sufficient to forbid Mr Tod dismissing the matter altogether without further investigation. Inquiries, however, both at Milnathort and Kinross tended further to discredit Miss Beveridge's story. Nobody in Milnathort had

seen or heard anything of a conveyance that morning. The testimony, too, of the groom at the Green Inn, Kinross, was conclusive that no vehicle had passed through Kinross in either direction, for he had been up before four that morning, to supply a relay of horses to an express messenger with despatches from the fleet in the North Seas. The messenger had not arrived,—no doubt the vessel bearing the expected despatches had been unable to make the Moray Firth owing to the westerly winds,—and from half-past three onwards, for many hours, no conveyance had passed Kinross that morning. Mr Tod was able to make all these inquiries without exciting any comment, for in those days, when the road was the only highway, and when serious crime was more frequent in the provinces than is now the case, the public prosecutor had constant occasion to make inquiries concerning passing conveyances and their occupants.

II.

On the day following the events above related, Edinburgh was shocked by the news of the brutal murder, on the road near Dunkeld, of Mr Wylie, a well-known Clerk to the Signet.

Mr Wylie was agent and factor for a large estate a few miles south of Dunkeld, on the Birnam side of the river, and he had gone north to collect the rents. After the collection he had dined, as was his custom, with the proprietor; he was then put across the river to the Dunkeld side, and he started to walk to the inn at Dunkeld, where he had put up for the two nights of his sojourn in the district. He never reached the inn, and nothing more was heard of him, but his hat was found next morning floating in the river near Delvine. Suspicion fastened upon an Italian who had been seen at Dunkeld the previous day. He was arrested at Perth, and the worst suspicions were fully confirmed by the discovery upon his person of a pocket-book and watch, which were identified as having belonged to Mr Wylie, and of which the Italian could give no better account than the oft-told tale of having found them upon the road. No trace was, however, discovered of the money-bag with £1500 of rent collected that day by Mr Wylie, which the Italian had doubtless *planted* somewhere near at hand.

Four weeks had passed, and nothing had occurred to suggest to Mr Tod that there was

any substantial basis for Miss Beveridge's narrative, which indeed now remained in his memory only as a painful recollection of a wasted morning and a striking illustration of the mischievous consequences of the disregard of the most elementary laws of health. Meanwhile the proofs of the guilt of the Italian accused of Mr Wylie's murder had accumulated with overwhelming force. A blood-stained knife was found in his pocket, and the hairs which adhered to it corresponded in colour to those of Mr Wylie. Blood-stains, too, were found upon the Italian's clothes. Traces of blood were found upon the road near Dunkeld, and there were marks of footprints down to the river near the spot, some of which seemed to correspond with those of the Italian, whilst the mud upon his trousers was of the same colour and quality as the mud upon the edge of the water. Already the *gamins* of Edinburgh and Perth were holding mock hangings of Gasparini.

It happened one day at this time that Mr Thorn, the proprietor of an estate a mile or two to the west of Kinross, was out in the afternoon in quest of a shot at a cushie or a rabbit, for the shooting season proper had not yet begun. He had wandered a little off his

ground, but in these days, when game was not much preserved and when the right of shooting was of no commercial value, neighbouring proprietors often indulged one another with liberty to shoot over each other's ground. Mr Thorn had wounded a hare, which hobbled away towards a neighbouring covert, now a fir plantation, but then covered with natural scrub and whins. He followed up, expecting every moment to see the hare drop; but the animal held on wonderfully, and after one or two abortive efforts to cross the dyke, it at last managed to struggle over into the wood. Mr Thorn crept up cautiously, hoping to get another shot at it. On gaining the edge of the thicket he saw the hare sitting within easy shot, and he at once raised his gun to give it the *coup-de-grâce*. But just as he was about to pull the trigger something caught his eye away beyond the hare but directly in the line of fire, and he lowered his gun. "Yes," he murmured, peering through the trees, "there's somebody there. By Jove, that fellow has had a lucky let-off, and he's lost me that hare too," for the hare had meanwhile hirkled away deeper into the wood.

Mr Thorn determined to cross into the wood to see if he could not get another chance

of picking up his wounded quarry. The fence was an awkward one, for he had to descend into a ditch and then to climb up the bank and over the wall at the other side. On gaining the wood Mr Thorn advanced in the direction in which the hare had disappeared, and to his surprise he found that the stranger who had spoilt his sport had meanwhile decamped. Not a trace of him was to be seen. Mr Thorn tried to follow up the hare, but without success, and he returned homewards with none the kindest of feelings towards the stranger who had robbed him of his soup.

Next day Mr Chalmers, one of Mr Thorn's tenants, came along in the evening to pay his rent. It was always Mr Thorn's custom on these occasions to take a glass of something hot with his tenant; so, after business had been disposed of, he invited Mr Chalmers to partake.

"But A'll be keepin' ye frae yer freens, A' doot," said Mr Chalmers.

"Whaten freens, Jeemes, man?"

"A' thocht ye had companee the noo. A' seen a gentleman the day i' the wud by Dirley yont, an A' thocht he'd bin stoppin' here, for a' the ither big folks are awa' the noo, ye ken."

Mr Thorn questioned Chalmers with regard to this stranger, and it appeared that, happening to pass the wood in question in the course of the afternoon, he had seen a stranger of gentlemanly appearance sitting upon the trunk of a fallen tree, and had concluded that he was a visitor of Mr Thorn's out there for an afternoon stroll.

Next morning Mr Thorn was walking about by the side of his house enjoying a whiff, when his eyes fell upon Dirley Wood in the distance, and his thoughts at once reverted to the mysterious stranger who seemed to have made that spot his haunt. Several times he tried to dismiss the subject from his mind, but it always drew over him again with a strange fascination, and his eye wandered away to the wood across the fields. "Let me see," he said at last—"I'm not due at that meeting at Kinross until half-past eleven; I've just time to take a run across and see if our friend is at home this morning." Mr Thorn approached the wood in the same direction in which he had pursued the hare, and reaching the edge he peered in through the branches. "No; he's not there; but, let me see, was that the place? No; it was a little further over. Yes, by Gad, there he is again."

Mr Thorn was looking at the man aslant across the wood, and he perceived that by going along a little way opposite to where the man was sitting he could get a much better view of him. Between the place where Mr Thorn stood and a spot exactly opposite the stranger, where there was another gap, it was impossible to see into the wood owing to the thick growth of underwood along the edge. Mr Thorn paused just before reaching the gap and peered through the verge of the undergrowth. The stranger was sitting upon the trunk of a fallen tree not more than twenty-five paces distant, and looking straight in the direction of the gap.

"Well, he has got little enough to do, I should say," muttered Mr Thorn; "and sitting without a hat, too, this damp morning. I must try and draw him;" and emerging from cover, Mr Thorn planted himself in the gap.

"Good morning, sir," he began.

There was no reply.

"I say, sir—I wish you good morning, sir. It's a very fine day, sir," shouted Mr Thorn. Still no response.

"Poor fellow," murmured Mr Thorn, "it is quite clear that he is off his head. I must speak to Tod about this at once;" and he

turned away, for it was time to bethink himself of the meeting at Kinross.

Later in the forenoon Mr Thorn had an opportunity of speaking to Mr Tod in private, and he inquired whether he had received any information of a lunatic of gentlemanly appearance being at large, and he then went on to explain what had been seen in Dirley Wood. Mr Tod had received no information which threw light upon the matter, but of course he felt bound to look into the affair.

“I’ll tell you what it is, Tod. You’ll come out and try pot-luck with me; it’s Saturday, you know, and I’ll show you the gentleman, that you may judge for yourself.”

Mr Tod agreed to go.

Dinner was at half-past three, and there was an hour to spare beforehand, so the two gentlemen walked over to Dirley Wood to see if the stranger was again to be found. As they neared the wood Mr Tod hazarded a confident prediction that the stranger would not be forthcoming, and that consequently their walk would be in vain; but, not being a betting man, and being constitutionally cautious, he declined Mr Thorn’s invitation to back his opinion to the extent of a crown. Mr Thorn, who knew the exact spot, was at the edge of

the wood a moment sooner than his companion. "You've saved that crown," he murmured, as he peered through the branches—"a single step this way and you have him full in view." The two friends placed themselves in the gap, and there, full in front of them, sat the strange gentleman in the same seat as before. He was a man apparently just past middle life, tall and handsome, with a fine open forehead, and a bald head fringed with dark-grey hair. His clothes were black, though, as was natural in view of the kind of life he seemed to be leading, they were much mud-bespattered and bedraggled.

"There's a fine afternoon, sir," said Mr Tod.

The stranger made no response.

"It's of no use, I tell you," said Mr Thorn, "he won't answer."

"Well, at all events, let us go over and stir him up," said the Fiscal.

The two friends descended into the ditch and scrambled up the bank over into the wood.

"Hulloa! I say, he's bolted!" exclaimed Mr Thorn when they had reached the inside of the wood.

The stranger had indeed disappeared the moment the two friends proceeded to cross

into the wood, and although they hurried forward he was too agile or too cunning for them, for they were unable to ascertain even the direction he had taken.

“This is a very serious business,” said Mr Tod, as they turned to give up the chase; “I must have men out to-morrow to search the wood,—in fact, I don’t know but what I ought to go back to Kinross at once for the purpose.”

“Oh no! come, my dear Tod; dinner, you know, is dinner, even though that poor chap gets none. He looks wonderfully fresh, and I daresay he will keep for another night.”

Mr Tod was constrained.

Mr Thorn’s family were from home, so there were just the two friends at dinner. Throughout the meal and the after-dinner potation the conversation again and again reverted to the same subject. The mysterious stranger seemed to exercise a fascinating influence over both gentlemen.

“There is one circumstance,” said Mr Tod, as he dismissed a glass of port,—“there is one circumstance from which I infer that, though the stranger haunts the wood, he has access to some civilised place of abode.”

“And what is that?” inquired Mr Thorn.

“I had a good look at him—a particularly

good look—the sun was just on his face, and, unless I am very much mistaken, he must certainly have shaved within the last forty-eight hours; his chin was quite smooth.”

“Tod,” said Mr Thorn gravely,—“Tod, you are a born lawyer. Another glass of the port, it will do you no harm; or would you rather have something hot now?”

It was wearing towards seven o'clock when Mr Thorn at length rose.

“I'll tell you what it is, Tod—it's a beautiful evening, and there are still two good hours of light. Let us take a stroll over to Dirley and see if our gentleman is going to roost on his perch, or if he has betaken himself for the night to some more 'civilised place of abode.'”

Mr Tod was quite agreeable, and the two friends started—Mr Thorn for the third time that day—to walk over to Dirley Wood. A glance through the underwood satisfied them that the stranger had resumed his solitary post. Before disclosing themselves at the gap the two friends held a brief consultation. It was agreed that Mr Tod should show himself at the gap as before, in order to attract the man's attention, whilst Mr Thorn should go round and get into the thicket by the other side, and so try to steal up upon him unawares.

"If he breaks cover he will come in your direction," whispered Mr Thorn; "and in any case you will keep a sharp look-out and see which way he takes."

The wood was not a large one, and Mr Thorn soon made the necessary detour. Being familiar with the ground, he then took a bee-line for the fallen tree, where the stranger was seated, and stole quietly up towards it. But when he got near the tree Mr Thorn perceived that the man was gone. Mr Tod was at his post.

"Hulloa, Tod," cried Mr Thorn, "where is he?"

"He's gone."

"The deuce he is! but which way did he go?"

"I can't say."

"You can't say! Why, where were your eyes! You haven't been taking a nap, have you?" shouted Mr Thorn, who began to think that after all Mr Tod had been less abstemious than his host had imagined.

"No," replied Mr Tod, looking very foolish, "but he just slipped away somehow, and disappeared amongst the trees. I can't really say which way he took."

"But, dear me, you can see twenty-five

yards clear in any direction round the place where he was sitting. You must have seen whether he went to the right or the left. Let me see, where were you standing?" said Mr Thorn, who had now advanced to the dyke, and was quite provoked at the stupidity of the Fiscal. So saying, he scrambled over the dyke, and placed himself in the position Mr Tod had occupied. "Now, don't you see," he continued, pointing to the open spaces round the fallen tree, "how could you fail to—— But why, wha—what the—there the fellow is again!"

The stranger had returned and resumed his seat the moment Mr Thorn quitted the wood.

"Now, Tod," said Mr Thorn, when he had recovered from his extreme surprise, "you'll cross there, and go straight at him. I'll stand here and keep him in view, and follow the moment I see which way he takes."

Mr Tod scrambled over, but ere he had set foot in the wood the man had again disappeared.

"Well, where has he gone?" inquired Mr Tod.

"I'll swear," replied Mr Thorn, "that he hasn't crossed my line of view in any direction. There is an old ditch behind the tree; he must

have slipped down there. I think we have him now."

Mr Thorn crossed the dyke, and then the two advanced and proceeded to examine the ditch, which was broad and deep, and full of dead leaves. But nothing was to be seen of the stranger.

"Bah! Pfui! what a horrible smell," said Mr Thorn as they looked about. "He might have been a badger!"

"It's not pleasant, certainly," said Mr Tod, poking about in the ditch. "Surely," he added in a moment, "some one has been digging here;" and he thrust his stick into a heap of fresh earth and leaves. "Hulloa, what's this?" His stick had struck something hard. Stooping down, he brushed aside the leaves with his hand, and there was disclosed a shoe which apparently covered a human foot. "Here's our friend at last!"

"Lord bless me! Lord preserve me!" said Mr Thorn, "he must be half mole, half man! How the deuce does he breathe under all that stuff?"

Mr Tod had meanwhile scraped a little further, and disclosed the other foot.

"Come," he said, "you take one foot and I'll take the other, and we'll soon haul him out."

"All right," replied Mr Thorn; "but take care, a brute like this may bite."

Each of the explorers then stooped, and seized a foot. The loose earth and leaves yielded readily, and they drew out from under them the dead body of a man, in a pretty advanced stage of decomposition.

"God help us! God help us!" exclaimed both friends, as they started back and involuntarily clutched each other by the arm.

"You don't know him?" said Mr Tod, after a long pause.

"No; I doubt if his dearest friend could recognise him now."

"He seems to have been a man in a good position of life."

"Yes; his get-up is most correct—complete down to his very shoe-buckles. No; I see, by the way, he has lost one."

"I think I can complete even that," said Mr Tod, for once forgetting his accustomed caution; and he drew a buckle from his fob, and held it beside the one on the poor gentleman's shoe. The buckles were clearly a pair.

"Then you know something about this! You have a clue!"

"That may or may not be," said Mr Tod,

biting his lips. "But, meanwhile, pray do not mention this buckle incident to any one."

"It will be necessary," continued Mr Tod in a moment, "to have the body removed to Kinross. Will you kindly go for assistance and a cart, and I shall wait here to see that nothing is disturbed."

"What, will you stay here alone?" inquired Mr Thorn in astonishment.

"Certainly," replied Mr Tod. "I am flesh and blood, and I tell you frankly I don't like it, but it is my duty;" and he seated himself upon the fallen tree.

"Well," replied Mr Thorn, "I used to think myself a bit of a philosopher, but, duty or no duty, I would not stay here alone just now, if you gave me Kinross-shire."

Later in the evening the body was removed to Kinross. Next day it lay exposed to view in the churchyard, but nobody could identify it. Mr Tod brought Miss Beveridge to look at it, but although she thought the clothes and general contour of the body similar to those of the gentleman she had seen assaulted on the road, she was unable, owing to its advanced state of decomposition, positively to identify the body. A medical examination ascertained that the cause of death was asphyxia. The

only external injuries were a bruise upon the chest and marks of finger-nails upon the throat. On the day following, the body was buried close to the Arnot burying-ground, in the graveyard beside the lake. Mr Tod, the parish minister, and two grave-diggers, were alone present at the interment.

III.

Miss Beveridge was very proud of her father's memory, and she was most anxious to possess a portrait of him. Some time before his death his portrait had been painted, but this was done for a brother of the doctor's, a retired Indian, and was now in possession of his son, a cousin of Miss Beveridge, who was a writer in Edinburgh. Miss Beveridge desired to have a picture based upon this portrait for herself by a skilled hand; and with that view, one day in August, when she happened to be in Edinburgh, she called upon Mr Raeburn, who had already risen to distinction in his profession. After her return home, she waited upon Mr Tod in almost as great a state of nervous excitement as on the memorable morning of the murder, three months before. In Mr Raeburn's studio she had seen a life-size

portrait of the poor gentleman she saw strangled on the Great North Road at Milnathort.

“I was so put about,” she said, “that I was afraid to ask who it was; and I thought, too, that perhaps I had better say nothing until I had seen you.”

Mr Thorn had been up in London for a week or two, and on his way home he stayed for a day in Edinburgh, being anxious to purchase a horse. Crossing St Andrew Square early in the afternoon, he met Mr Tod. The two friends conversed for a few minutes, and then Mr Tod asked Mr Thorn if he happened to be personally acquainted with Raeburn, the portrait-painter.

“Why, yes; I know him very well indeed—a very good fellow!”

“Would it trouble you too much to take me to call upon him? I am anxious to make his acquaintance, for a reason which I shall perhaps explain to you again.”

“With the greatest pleasure in the world; but, first of all, you must oblige me. I want your opinion of a horse.”

Later in the day, when the horse business had been disposed of, the two friends called upon Mr Raeburn. The painter received his visitors in his parlour, and was all affability—“delighted to make Mr Tod’s acquaintance,”

&c. &c. When they had conversed together for some time, Mr Tod, who seemed fidgety and ill at ease, at last remarked, "Perhaps I am taking too great a liberty, but I have a great desire to see your workshop."

"With the greatest pleasure in the world," said the painter. "Come along," and he led them to the studio. The room was dark, for the blinds were down, and Raeburn went to the window to pull them up. As the light streamed into the room, Mr Tod looked at Mr Thorn, and Mr Thorn looked at Mr Tod, but neither spoke. On a large easel, in the centre of the room, was a full-length portrait of the man they had seen sitting upon the fallen tree in Dirley Wood.

"Ah, you are looking at that," said the painter, turning from the window. "It is the saddest task I ever put my hands to. I hadn't the heart to touch it these three months, until the other day."

"Indeed!" said Mr Thorn. "Then something has happened to the gentleman?"

"Ah! you did not know him! It is poor Wylie, who was murdered at Dunkeld in May last."

Mr Raeburn must have thought the manner of his guests peculiar, for neither of them seemed to give much further heed to his

conversation. He directed their attention to several other more or less finished portraits in the studio, but their lack of appreciation was most disappointing. Again and again their eyes wandered back to the portrait in the centre of the room.

"Have you done much to this since his death?" inquired Mr Tod at last.

"Oh no; as I say, I did not touch it until the other day, and I have only given an hour or two to it altogether. Fortunately it was nearly finished at the last sitting, just the day before he left Edinburgh. I was busy with the legs and feet that day: you'll notice he had very neat feet. And the buckles too, luckily I painted them, for he would not be persuaded to leave them with me. It wouldn't have been Wylie without them. They're quite peculiar. You'll notice the Indian work at the edges. His uncle, I believe, got them made in the East."

"They're uncommon then, are they?" inquired Mr Tod.

"Yes, quite; I never saw another pair like them."

"Then I have been lucky," said Mr Tod. "I picked up just such a pair the other day."

So saying he drew a buckle from his pocket, and held it against one of the buckles in the

picture. The shape and pattern of the two were indistinguishable.

Next day the buckles, as also the clothes of the man found in Dirley Wood, were identified by Mrs Wylie as those of her deceased husband; and her statement, along with that of Miss Beveridge, having been submitted to the Lord Advocate, a despatch was at once sent up by express to London to secure a reprieve for Gasparini, who at the Perth Autumn Circuit Court had been convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of Mr Wyle. Diligent inquiries were set on foot with reference to conveyances which had been hired in the neighbouring counties on the day before the murder, and the following facts were elicited: Orders had been given by letters from Edinburgh, forged in the name of the Sheriff of Orkney (whose naval dignity was not then so entirely ornamental and picturesque as in these happier times, inasmuch as he was responsible for the transmission of despatches from ships of war in the North Seas), to hostleries at Dunkeld, Perth, and Kinross, to have relays of horses ready for an express messenger with despatches from the north. The horses ordered at Dunkeld and Perth were duly supplied to the supposed messenger, but, as already stated,

those ordered at Kinross were never required. On the afternoon of the day of Mr Wylie's disappearance, two men, one a young man of gentlemanly appearance, the other an older man in semi-sailor attire, with rings in his ears, and with a very imperfect command of English, appeared at a posting establishment at Blairgowrie (all inquiries failed to elicit whence or how they came), and hired a post-chaise to take them to Dunkeld. Soon after leaving Blairgowrie, the men offered drink to the driver, who, after taking it, became very ill, and was unable to drive. They put him down, therefore, at a roadside cottage; and the younger of the two travellers mounted the box, and drove to Dunkeld, where they took up the relay of horses. They left Dunkeld about 9.30 P.M., and at one o'clock in the morning they arrived in Perth, where horses were again changed. At Perth there was a third gentleman in the carriage, but he appeared to be asleep, and did not get out. The next trace of the carriage and its occupants was the scene upon the road near Milnathort witnessed by Miss Beveridge at four o'clock in the morning. Apparently the coach had then turned west past Orwell Church, and along the Warroch Road, for it was seen passing Carnbo

shortly after five o'clock, and it was next heard of at the inn at the Yetts of Muckhart, nine miles west of Milnathort, which was reached a little before six o'clock. There the two men, for the carriage had now but two occupants, left the horses and conveyance, with directions to have them returned in the afternoon to Perth by the Dunning Road, by which, as they represented, they had themselves come. A gig and driver were hired by the men at the Yetts, and in this they were driven down past Saline to Torryburn on the Firth of Forth, where they dismounted and discharged the trap, at half-past eight o'clock. They were then seen to proceed a short distance along the shore towards Crombie Point, off which a sloop had been lying all morning. In answer apparently to their hail, a boat came off from the sloop and took them on board. The vessel immediately afterwards weighed anchor and made sail down the Firth, and all further trace of her and of the men aboard was lost. These facts, taken together with the story of Miss Beveridge and the discovery and identification of the body, seemed to make it clear that Mr Wylie was waylaid and drugged on his way home to Dunkeld. The kidnappers had thrown out his watch and pocket-book, and put his hat in the river to make it appear that

he had been murdered, and they had then driven to Perth, and on past Perth to Milnathort. Here, either on account of careless drugging or of the rebellion of his stomach against attempts to renew the dose, Mr Wylie had recovered and attempted to escape, with the fatal result witnessed by Miss Beveridge. The murderers, unable to dispose of the body before reaching Kinross, were obliged to abandon their intention of changing horses there, and therefore turned west towards the Yetts of Muckhart by the Dollar Road. The body was hid in Dirley Wood, and they then proceeded on to Muckhart.

IV.

The necessary steps were being taken to have Gasparini's reprieve converted into a pardon, there being nothing to connect him with the crime on the theory now adopted, and speculation was rife as to whether by inquiries at the ports it would be possible to trace the murderers, when one morning the startling report ran round that Mr Wylie was alive and in Edinburgh.

Nobody in Edinburgh was more generally or more justly respected than Mr William

Maxwell Morison, an advocate, who had devoted long years of labour to the compilation of a huge dictionary of the decisions of the Scottish Courts from the earliest times, a work which is still to be found in every law library. Mr Morison, whose studious life had developed in him certain eccentric habits, was in the way of rising very early, and every morning he would take a walk from his house in the High Street down over the fields towards Granton. He now asserted that starting in the morning on one of these strolls, and passing over the open ground north of St Andrew Square (now occupied by the Abercromby Place Gardens), he saw standing a little way off from him, amongst some bushes, Mr Wylie, whom he had known intimately, and whom everybody believed to be dead. Mr Morison hailed his friend, but Mr Wylie apparently desired to avoid an interview, for he made no response, and drew away behind the bushes. Everybody scouted this story. It had been clearly proved that Mr Wylie was murdered; and besides, Mr Wylie was the last man in the world to "get up" a mysterious disappearance. Poor Mrs Wylie, his widow, who had been sorely tried by her sudden bereavement, was painfully shocked by the story, which her know-

ledge of her husband's character forbade her for one moment to credit. Mr Morison, it was generally remarked, was getting old, and his labours with his dictionary must have unhinged his understanding.

But Mr Morison was very obstinate, and very provoked at the reception which his tale received, and he determined that if he saw Mr Wylie again he would by no means allow him to escape. The very next morning (it was a Sunday), when setting out for his walk, Mr Morison saw Mr Wylie again near the same spot, and he at once went after him as fast as his old legs could carry him. Mr Wylie, who was still apparently determined to avoid being accosted, withdrew rapidly up the hill in the direction of St Andrew Square. The lexicographer, however, gained upon him, and was close up when Mr Wylie reached the gate of a garden, which at that time ran down from the back of one of the houses on the north side of the Square. Mr Wylie passed through the garden door, and Mr Morison, who recognised the garden as one attached to the house of Mrs Grant, mother of Mrs Wylie, attempted to follow. But the garden door was firmly shut in his face. He at once scrambled up the wall, but Mr Wylie had disappeared. There

was no time for him to have gained the house before his pursuer had mounted the wall, and it seemed clear that he must have entered an outbuilding at the foot of the garden, close to the door through which he had passed. Mr Morison scrambled over, and tried the door of the outhouse. It was barred. He peered through the window, but there was no one in the washhouse, for such the building appeared to be. Next he hurried round to see if his friend were lurking behind the building. He was not there, but Mr Morison noticed a window at the back. It appeared that there were two apartments in the outbuilding. Mr Morison looked in at the back window. The room appeared to be a workshop, for there were tools and chips lying about, and there, in a corner, was Mr Wylie upon his knees. He had raised one of the planks of the floor, and was rummaging away underneath it. Mr Morison tried to open the window, but it refused to yield. Then he hurried round again to the door, and endeavoured to stave it in. In vain! Several times he rushed round the building, from window to door and from door to window, seeking an ingress. One may have noticed a dog which has run a rabbit to earth in a small burrow. It feels its prey

almost at its nose ; it scrapes and tears and gnaws the ground, and every moment it springs from one hole to the other in wild excitement, terrified lest its quarry may make a bolt for it and escape. Even so did Mr Morison rush from back to front of the outhouse, now dash himself against the door of the washhouse, and now shake the window of the toolhouse ! Never had the discovery even of the most important decision, hid away unsuspected in some dusty tome of manuscript, thrown the worthy lawyer into such a paroxysm of excitement. When the dog gets tired of scraping and snorting and rushing about, it sometimes sits still for a moment, its nose an inch or two from the mouth of one of the holes, and seems to consider what is to be the next move. So at last Mr Morison, mopping the perspiration from his forehead and heaving all over with exhaustion, sat down upon a chopping log beside the washhouse door, and for a moment considered the situation. Upon one thing he was quite determined : not to quit the building until Mr Wylie was taken from it dead or alive. It was only half-past five of the morning, and nobody seemed to be stirring about. Mr Morison scanned the windows of St Andrew Square, but there was not even an

early rising servant-maid to be seen. Then it occurred to him to shout, and he gave several loud hulloas, but still nobody appeared. He took another turn round the building, and tried the window again. It would not yield. "Let me see," he said at last, picking up a stone, "I used to be pretty good at a shy in my day. I wonder if I could put a stone through one of these windows."

Dr James Gregory, a man of mark in his profession, round whose memory still cluster some of the most loving associations of every well-regulated nursery, was Professor of the Practice of Physic in the University of Edinburgh, and resided in one of the houses on the north side of St Andrew Square.

The Professor was in bed enjoying his repose, and filled in his moments of half-wakefulness with a delicious, dreamy consciousness that it was Sunday morning, and that therefore there were still hours of untroubled rest before him, when he was suddenly roused by his wife.

"Are you awake, James?" inquired Mrs Gregory.

"No; what is it?" replied the Professor, with less than his usual urbanity.

"I am sure I heard somebody calling."

"Tuts! tuts! you've been dreaming. Go to sleep."

There was silence for a minute or two, and then Mrs Gregory again roused her husband.

"There, James, didn't you hear that? Three shouts quite distinct."

"I don't care if there were fifty," snarled the Professor. "Get up if you are not going to lie quiet, but don't bother me."

The Professor closed his eyes and turned his face to the wall, and for a few minutes there was again silence in the bedroom. Then a tremendous crash made both the Professor and his wife spring from their pillows and huddle themselves, cowering in the back corner of the bed. Some heavy missile had come smash through the window, knocked over a lamp on a table near the centre of the room, and spent its force in shattering a panel mirror on the wardrobe door.

"The French! my dear, the French!" gasped the Professor, throwing his arm round the frightened woman. "God help us all, I knew it would come to this."

There was silence for a moment as they listened for fresh sounds of violence, and then a foot protruding from under the huddled bed-clothes caught the Professor's eye.

"It would be dreadful, dear, if they came in and found us like this," he whispered.

"Come in! Oh, surely, James, they will not, they dare not come into this room!"

"War is war," said the Professor sadly.

"But you will never let them in here? You will protect me, James?"

"With my life, love. Still, it would be better to have something on."

"Yes, you are quite right, James; but all my things are at the other side of the room. If I had even a petticoat!"

"I shall try and get one," said the Professor, rising in the bed.

"But be careful, James; you might be shot passing the window."

"I shall creep along the floor," replied the Professor.

Dr Gregory descended cautiously from the bed, and on his hands and knees he wended his way past the broken glass and splashes of oil to the other side of the room. Out of range of the window he ventured to rise and secure some garments, which he threw across to his wife, and then he pulled on his own breeches. All was now silent outside, and the Professor's curiosity was rising fast.

"I think I shall just keek and see what they are about."

"Don't—James, don't; you may be hit, and what will become of me with these ruffians?"

The Professor, however, was not to be daunted, and creeping to the edge of the window, he ventured to show half an eye round the corner. At first he saw nothing to account for the recent catastrophe; but growing bolder, and looking a little further round towards the foot of his neighbour's garden, he saw there, not a band of blue-coated Frenchmen, but the learned author of the 'Dictionary of Decisions,' who was wildly gesticulating with his hands.

"Well, upon my word," said the Professor, choking with indignation, "if it isn't that man Morison! I knew he was mad. I said he was mad. I told Hope he was mad; and there he is just raving. Get me that gun at once from the top of the wardrobe."

"Oh, James, you're not going to kill him, surely!"

"No, no; but I shall keep him from further mischief; hand me the gun."

An old rusty blunderbuss, which had belonged to the Professor's grand-uncle, and had

seen service in the Low Countries in the wars of King William, lay upon the top of the wardrobe, and this weapon Mrs Gregory now handed to her husband.

"Now go and tell Janet to run for the night-watch," said the Professor, as he laid hold of the murderous instrument.

Mrs Gregory disappeared on the errand, and the Professor threw up the window-sash and leant forward on the sill.

"He is here! He is here! Wylie is here! He cannot escape!" shouted Mr Morison in great excitement.

"Look you here, sir," said the Professor, raising the blunderbuss to his shoulder. "You stay where you are, sir. You don't move a foot, sir, or I'll shoot you down like a dog, sir."

"For God's sake, put that thing down, sir. For God's sake, don't point it here. It's me—Morison!" screamed the lawyer, who saw that the Professor was covering him with the weapon.

"Lie down, then, down on your belly, sir, or I shall certainly fire," replied the Professor, placing his finger upon the trigger.

Mr Morison clapped on the ground like a rabbit, and the Professor congratulated himself on his cleverness, in thus at once disarm-

ing the maniac and preventing his escape. For several minutes the two men remained watching each other. Every time that Mr Morison attempted to move or to open explanations, the blunderbuss was again raised to the Professor's shoulder, and the lawyer subsided with trembling limbs. At last two night-watchmen, who had heard the shouting, and had thus anticipated the servant's summons, appeared behind the wall, and peered over. The sight they saw was one for which even the varied experience of a night-watchman had no parallel,—a distinguished legal writer stretched prone in the dust, cowering under the threatened fire of a learned Professor in his night-shirt at the window above!

When the Professor saw the guardians of the public peace scrambling over the wall he laid aside his weapon, and hastened down to explain the unfortunate case. He found Mr Morison eagerly relating to the officers how he had seen Mr Wylie in the toolhouse, and the Professor at once directed the men to have the poor gentleman removed to the watch-house until his friends could be communicated with. Meanwhile, a number of people, roused by the disturbance, were collecting at the spot, and scrambling over into Mrs Grant's gardens. Amongst the new arrivals was Mrs Grant's

housemaid, and that girl suggested that before taking the gentleman away they might as well search the outbuilding. The suggestion took fire, and the girl was directed to run for the key, notwithstanding the scornful protests of the Professor, who wanted his prisoner marched off at once. When the girl returned with the key, the company searched the washhouse, but found nothing; they searched the toolhouse, but there was nobody there; they examined the beams and rafters of the roof, but Mr Wylie was not lurking among them.

"I told you so; take him away, take him away at once!" exclaimed the triumphant Professor.

"He was here! he was here! I tell you he was here!" protested Mr Morison, wringing his hands, "here in the toolhouse, not a quarter of an hour ago, in that corner there close to the wall, and he lifted one of the planks of the flooring."

"Well, well, sir, you had better come and explain about it to the Bailie," said one of the watchmen, touching Mr Morison's arm. It would all have been up, and the most industrious of Scottish lawyers would have been marched ignominiously away to the lock-up at St Giles, but a girl—the same who had

suggested the search — stooped down and tried the different planks of the flooring near the corner indicated. The fourth plank from the wall came away readily in her hands. Nothing was to be seen, but one of the watchmen stooped down, and gave a rummage round under the adjoining planks.

“Here’s something, at all events,” he said, as he drew out a black handbag.

“Why,” exclaimed the girl, “that’s Mr Wylie’s bag; he used to take it out and in every day when he stayed with us in the country.”

The bag was opened. It had two compartments. In the one there was a bundle of notes, and two smaller bags full of coin; in the other there were some writing materials, several opened letters addressed to Mr Wylie, and the lease of a farm on the M—— estate, signed by landlord and tenant on the day of Mr Wylie’s disappearance.

v.

It was the October Communion in the Tron Church of Edinburgh. The sermon was over; the tables had been “fenced,” and the elements brought in for the first table service. There

were certain details in the conduct of the service that might in our day be deemed lacking in taste or even reverence. But the uncouthness gave no offence, and there was in it not a trace of real irreverence, for nobody perceived or realised it. There was, too, in the whole service, a solemnity—a sense of reality—which is perhaps not always present nowadays even with a more ornate ritual. The Church of Scotland was then all-powerful, because hardly yet rent by schism; her table was the true meeting-place of the people, for all gathered there, the loftiest with the lowliest, to take from the common board and drink from the common cup the symbols of divine love and sacrifice.

The bread had been handed round, and there was stillness in the church as the cups passed from hand to hand along the tables. But suddenly the silence was broken by a woman's scream and a sound of scuffling. A lady had sprung from her place at the table just as a young man seated nearly opposite her had taken the cup into his hands.

“Don't let him drink, don't let him drink!” she exclaimed, as she tried to dash aside the cup from his lips. There was confusion for a moment, as several elders and the church-

officer hurried to the spot. The poor lady was bundled out of her place, and hustled away into the vestry; and then, after a pause, the service was resumed. In the vestry the lady, whose mind seemed to be affected, remained for some time in a very excited state. She was a stranger, nobody knew her, and she seemed too hysterical to give any account of herself or her conduct. By-and-by, however, she became calmer, and the doctor, who had been sent for, gathered from her that she was a Miss Beveridge from Milnathort, and that she had lodgings in the Lothian Road. She declined, however, to give any account of her conduct in the church until she had seen her agent, Mr Tod, writer, Kinross. A chair was got, and the lady was taken home to her lodgings. Next day Mr Tod was advised of the unfortunate state of his client, and requested to come to Edinburgh at once. Mr Tod came to Edinburgh on the Tuesday, and went to the Lothian Road to see Miss Beveridge. He found her wonderfully well and composed, but most anxious to have a private interview with him. When they were alone she told him that, seated at the Communion table and happening to look round, she saw the man who committed the murder

on the Old North Road, five months before, in the very act of taking the cup into his hands. Overcome with horror at the sight of one thus deliberately drinking everlasting judgment upon himself, she had sprung up at any cost to prevent the fearful act. Questioned as to her identification of the supposed murderer, Miss Beveridge was not to be shaken. She was positive that the man she saw in the Tron Church was the man she had seen commit the cruel deed upon the Old North Road. On making inquiries as to the identity of this man, Mr Tod learned with astonishment that he was a Mr John Grant, the brother of Mrs Wylie, and that in fact old Mrs Grant and Mrs Wylie had been seated beside him when Miss Beveridge interrupted the service.

Secret but diligent inquiries were now set on foot with reference to Grant's antecedents, and the result was far from satisfactory. John Grant, who was now about thirty years of age, appeared to be one of those men who, to great personal charms, a daring spirit, and much mental acuteness, unite a moral depravity which is almost devilish. He had been expelled from the High School when he was nine years old for theft. Sent next to a

school in England, he got into one serious scrape after another; and he was eventually sent home for attempting to set the building on fire. Another English school was tried; but he broke into a drawer in his master's bedroom, and carried off his wife's jewels to the pawnshop. He was expelled again. Next living at home and attending classes at the University was tried; but one day a professor missed a large sum from the drawer into which he collected his fees. Grant was strongly suspected, and although nothing was positively proved against him, his previous reputation was such that, taken together with present suspicion, it soon made the place too hot to hold him. Mr Wylie, who had just married Miss Grant, was now induced to take the lad into his office, and for a year or two Grant seemed to have steadied himself considerably. But in the end bills under Mr Wylie's hand were discovered by the bank to be forgeries, and it appeared that a system of fraud had been going on for several years. John Grant, who was then but eighteen years of age, withdrew from the country. For eleven years he led a roving life abroad. The only communications received from him were calls upon his mother for money, and whatever else was

heard of him from other sources there was never in it anything of good. Mr Wylie had strong reason to suspect that on more than one occasion, when the purse of Mrs Grant had an unusually long respite, the silence of her son was due to his acquaintance with the interior of a foreign prison. At last, however, after eleven years' absence, Grant returned home, and he was welcomed back, as such sons always are, by his mother as though he were the very salt of the earth. It was ascertained that after his return home Grant had been anxious to obtain from his mother money to fit out a vessel of marque; but the opposition of Mr Wylie, who managed the old lady's affairs and had great influence with her, defeated this scheme. On more than one occasion Grant had been heard to express his indignation at the conduct of Mr Wylie, and several of his friends had heard him, when in his cups, and talking of the pressgang, utter the wish that he could pack his brother-in-law off for six months on a voyage to the Indies. Still more significant was the fact that after his return home Grant had spent most of his time loafing about Leith in company with foreign sailors, and in particular with the skipper of a Portuguese schooner, whose appearance an-

swered exactly to the description of the sailor seen on the road between Blairgowrie and Torryburn on the night of the murder. Grant, too, it was ascertained, when in Mr Wylie's office, had more than once accompanied his brother-in-law on his rent-collecting journeys to Dunkeld, and he knew exactly what was the course of Mr Wylie's movements on these occasions. From a servant who had quitted Mrs Grant's service it was ascertained that Grant left Edinburgh on the day preceding that of Mr Wylie's disappearance. Two days later he returned in the evening, but he remained at home only for an hour or two, part of the time being spent in the toolhouse on the pretext of mending a box. He did not return home again for more than two months, and during his absence his mother was ignorant of his whereabouts.

All these facts, taken together with the mysterious discovery of Mr Wylie's bag in Mrs Grant's premises, seemed to confirm Miss Beveridge's statement, and the whole constituted a damning array of evidence against Grant. But still there was an indisposition to arrest a man respectably connected, and living quietly at home with his mother, on a charge so horrible as that of the murder of his own

brother-in-law, without the most conclusive proof of his guilt. Such a proof, it was thought, could be furnished only by his identification by the men who had seen the two travellers between Blairgowrie and Torryburn on the night of Mr Wylie's disappearance. It was accordingly arranged that on the following Sunday the stablemen from the different inns where the coach had called should have places in the Tron Church in view of the seat where Grant sat regularly with his mother. Arrangements were made to have Grant arrested on leaving the church in the event of the testimony of these men confirming that of Miss Beveridge.

The identification was complete. The men left the church, by arrangement, the moment the benediction was pronounced, and none of them had any difficulty in certifying that Grant was one of the men who had been on the post-chaise on the night in question. As Grant left the church, a man touched his arm and informed him that a certain officer at the Castle was anxious to see him at once. Leaving his mother to find her way home, Grant turned up the High Street towards the Castle. When Mrs Grant was well out of sight, the man who had given Grant the message

came up to him in company with another man.

"Well, what is it now? what do you want?" said Grant sharply, when he noticed the men.

"Excuse me, Mr Grant," said the one who had not yet spoken to him, "but I hold here a warrant for your arrest."

"On what charge?" inquired Grant, without changing colour.

"The wilful murder of Andrew Wylie."

"Oh, very well, if that is so, so be it," replied Grant, with extraordinary self-possession; "but you will perhaps permit me first to go home to get some things."

"No, I am sorry I cannot; my orders are imperative to take you to jail at once. Anything you want will be sent for."

"Ah!" said Grant, fumbling in his pocket; "it doesn't matter, you know, only this is a very public place, and I see they are just coming out of the High Kirk. I always like to spare good people's feelings when I can."

The officers did not quite understand the remark, but they had not proceeded a dozen paces when they noticed that Grant was staggering heavily between them, and before they could get out their hands to support him he had fallen backwards on the causeway of

the High Street, just in front of the north doorway of St Giles' Cathedral. A small phial slipped from his fingers, and a hoarse, contemptuous laugh rose from his throat. For a moment he lay still, his eyes almost closed, and a crowd of worshippers coming from the church gathered round to see what was the matter. Then his whole frame was racked with frightful convulsions, that caused the group of ladies issuing from church, and attracted by the gathering crowd, to scatter right and left with cries of horror. But the paroxysm was soon over, and he was still for a moment again. Then he stretched himself, as a man stretches himself before rising, a short sigh passed from his white lips, there was a slight shudder, and then the limbs relaxed. John Grant lay dead upon the causeway, and the clock in the crown-steeple above struck one of the afternoon.

THE END.

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